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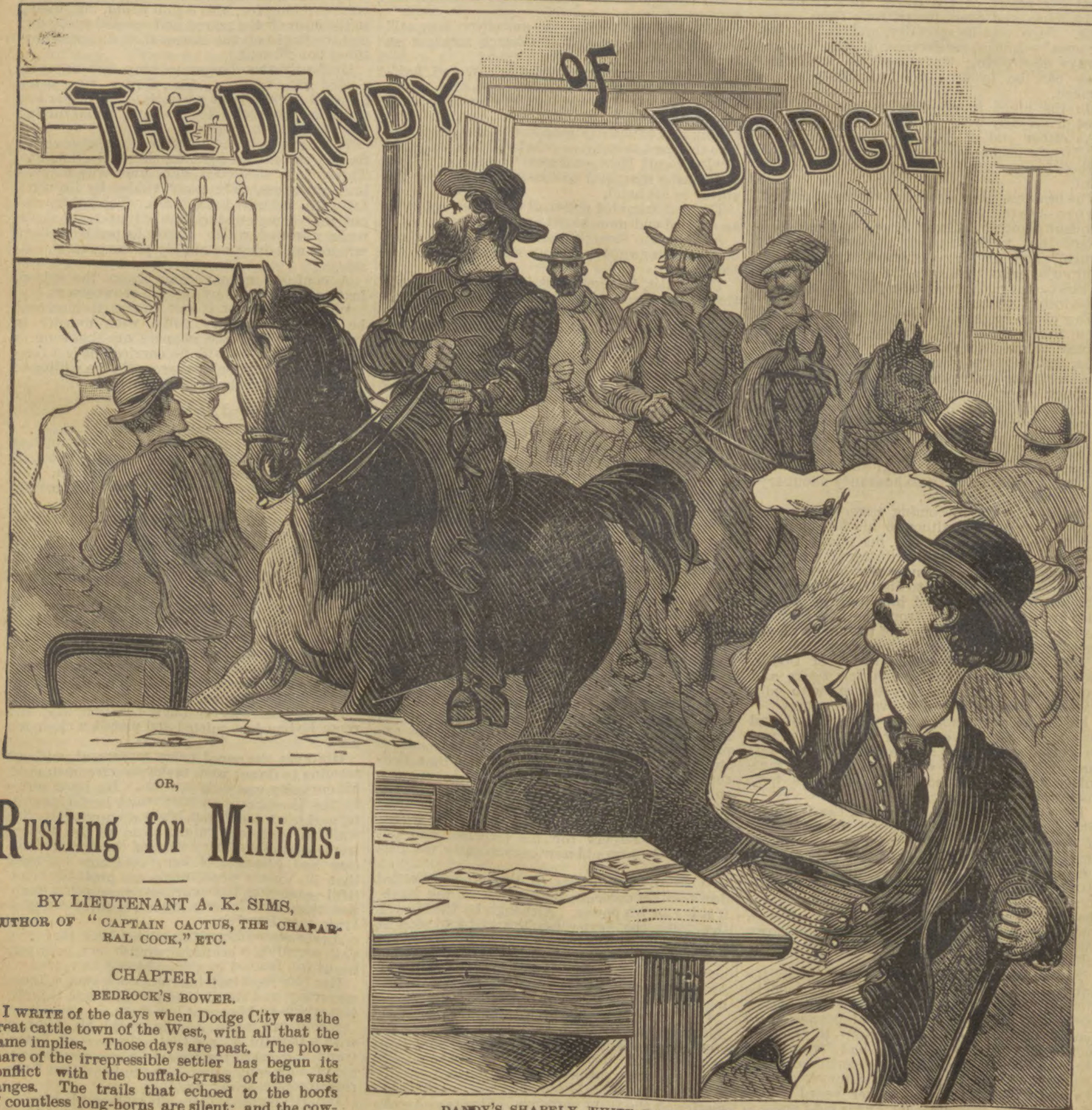
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OR,
Rustling for Millions.

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AUTHOR OF "CAPTAIN CACTUS, THE CHAPAR-
RAL COCK," ETC.

CHAPTER I.

BEDROCK'S BOWER.

I WRITE of the days when Dodge City was the great cattle town of the West, with all that the name implies. Those days are past. The plow-share of the irrepressible settler has begun its conflict with the buffalo-grass of the vast ranges. The trails that echoed to the hoofs of countless long-horns are silent; and the cowboy, with the myriad vultures that feed and

DANDY'S SHAPELY WHITE HAND CREPT SOFTLY INTO HIS BREAST, BUT HE ANSWERED NOT A WORD.

fatten on his profligacy and folly, has followed the ever-retreating border.

On the night in which this story opens, the saloon and gambling-den known as Bedrock's Bower, was enjoying an unprecedented run of custom; and, although the hour was late, excited crowds still hung round the gaming-tables, and drove the white-aproned waiters half-frantic with their unceasing stream of orders.

The Bower could not be called a "gilded" gambling hell. Its interior was rough and unpainted; the bottles and glasses behind the bar had a sloppy, unrinsed look, and the bar itself presented anything but a tidy appearance.

Jason Bedrock, the proprietor, who was engaged in the apparently endless task of mopping up, with a dirty cloth, the drippings from the trays and glasses, stopped occasionally and cast malignant glances toward the nearest faro layout.

He was a stoutly-built, red-faced man, with an evil eye and a shambling gait. His dress was of the latest cut, but it was specked with dirt and stained with tobacco-juice. An elaborate necktie and a profusion of heavy rings only added to the coarseness of his general appearance.

Bedrock's Bower was noted as the leading gambling resort of the town. It was an all-night house, and drew its patrons from every rank. Faro was its specialty, and the "knowing ones"—that never-decreasing class who are always discovering "systems" by which the bank can be broken—came regularly to be plucked.

On the night in question, however, it was filled principally with cowboys and sports.

At either end of the room was a faro "layout," each illuminated by one of the two huge coal-oil lamps that served to light the apartment.

The heaviest playing was at the table nearest the bar—the one toward which Bedrock cast his frequent glances. A large crowd had gathered about this table, intently watching every "turn," and giving boisterous expression to their enjoyment whenever the bank lost. And on this occasion, for a wonder, the bank seemed to be losing constantly.

Few of the spectators but had, at some time, been heavy losers by means of the "skin games" played in the Bower, and it tickled them immensely to discover that the rascally and swindling dealer had met his match.

Honor among gamblers is about as scarce an article as the honor that is mentioned as existing among thieves; and for much the same reason. These tricky gentry live by the gullibility and dishonesty of their patrons. Dealers and sports alike swindle the unsuspecting; and, when such victims are scarce, have no hesitancy about trying to swindle each other.

The dealer was becoming nervous over his lack of success; and, although his face gave no sign of the irritation he felt, his pliant fingers trembled slightly as they fluttered over the fickle pasteboards. He knew that he was being fleeced, and his inability to discover the trick by which it was done nettled him. As he slipped one card after the other from the box he fixed his burning eyes on the face of the lucky player opposite, hoping to discover his secret.

That lucky player was The Dandy of Dodge. He had only been in the town a few weeks and had contented himself, heretofore, with idly watching the progress of the various games.

His frame, while not large, was well-knit and powerful. His eyes and hair were brown and he sported a mustache and imperial of the same hue. His hands were white, shapely and muscular; his face handsome, though there were lines of dissipation in it.

The prim neatness of his attire, the immaculate whiteness of his shirt-front, the daintiness of his neck-tie, the polish of his boots and the glossiness of his high silk hat, had made of him a marked man from the start, and the title of Dandy had been conferred on him by common consent. Nothing was known of him, except that he had given his name as Clifford Keene, and, on one or two important occasions had shown that he was abundantly able to take care of himself.

It was evidently his intention to break the bank, if it could possibly be done. The trick he worked could not be used on a bright dealer now. Having secretly obtained possession of the "tools" of the bank, previous to the commencement of the playing, he had "doctored" them and had also sand-papered certain cards so that he could tell them by their movements in the box. The dealer had never heard of the trick and was, consequently, at his wits' end.

While the excitement of the game was at its

highest, a swaggering, brutal-looking cowboy elbowed his way through the throng, and, in doing so, stumbled heavily against the sport, almost knocking him from his chair. That an affront was intended scarcely admitted of a doubt.

There was an instant murmur of expectancy, and some of the more timid began to edge away from the table. A fight was anticipated, for the cowboy, who was known as Broncho Ben, or Broncho, had the reputation of being "a very bad man."

The villain cowed visibly as Dandy's fierce eyes fell upon him. That Broncho was Bedrock's tool Dandy well knew, and it flashed upon him instantly that Bedrock had sent him there for the purpose of provoking a quarrel. This would draw the lucky player away from the table and save the bank.

Recovering from the confusion into which Dandy's piercing gaze had thrown him, Broncho staggered to his feet and demanded, with a fierce cowl:

"What did you trip me fer, younker? Didn't know who you was stumblin' ag'inst, I reckon!"

An amused smile played over Dandy's features, but he never relaxed his burning gaze or deigned to answer.

His strange silence puzzled and angered the cowboy.

"Mebbe thet 'll make you move yer tongue!" he yelled, tossing a quid of tobacco straight at Dandy's face.

The sport dexterously dodged it, and, half-rising from his chair, dealt Broncho a sounding whack on the jaw. It was accomplished with such lightning-like rapidity that Broncho was rolling and bellowing upon the floor almost before the spectators knew what had taken place.

"Look out! He's got a gun!" some one yelled, as Broncho struggled to his feet, a cocked revolver in his hand.

The mob tumbled pell-mell over each other in an excited endeavor to get out of range.

As Broncho straightened himself up his right hand shot forward and there was an instant explosion.

The bullet, however, cut its way harmlessly through the roof. Just how it was done, no one could tell; but, as Broncho's finger touched the trigger, Dandy made a tiger-like leap. The revolver was sent spinning through the air, and Broncho was borne helplessly backward by the impetuous and sudden rush of his assailant.

Then was witnessed a marvelous exhibition of strength and agility. The fallen cowboy was lifted bodily in the air and borne, struggling and cursing, toward the open door, through which he was hurled into the street.

Having accomplished this apparently impossible feat, Dandy turned quietly about and retraced his steps to the table. Seating himself in the chair he had just vacated, he glanced at the undisturbed checks, nodded quietly to the dealer, and asked if he was ready to proceed.

The startled crowd, recovering its equanimity, straggled back, gazed with feelings of mingled awe and admiration at the unruffled face of the sport, and, as the game proceeded, became once more interested in the varying fortunes of the players.

As Dandy thought over the events that had just taken place he became more than ever convinced that Jason Bedrock was masked behind the cowboy's awkward attack.

He hoped the thorough shaking-up that he had given Broncho would prevent that ruffian from putting in a second appearance. He expected that another attempt would be made to stop the game. He argued, however, that Bedrock would probably have to get some one else to make the effort. This would doubtless consume time. The manner in which he had handled Broncho had inspired the toughs with a wholesome respect for his prowess, and not many of them would now care to enter the lists against him.

With these thoughts in his mind he settled down with a determination to break the bank, if it lay in his power. Although by the laws of the game, the dealer has the right to stop at any time, it was Bedrock's boast that his banks never closed; and Dandy believed that he could accomplish his purpose before any one could be found with sufficient courage to meddle in the matter.

In all this, however, he was greatly mistaken. Although badly shaken up, Broncho Ben had the stubbornness and foolhardy courage of a bulldog, and was not the kind of man to tamely submit to the treatment he had received.

In less than a half-hour there was a wild commotion at the front entrance. Shouts and yells filled the air. A confused trampling of hoofs

came from the pavement. A pistol-shot rung out, and a half-dozen cowboys, dressed as if just in from the range, rode their ponies, one after the other, right into the Bower!

The appearance of this formidable-looking cavalcade produced a partial panic; and, when it was seen that they were led by Broncho, there was a general rush for the doors and windows.

Dandy sat at the table, his right hand resting lightly against the lapel of his coat, apparently the most unconcerned man in the room. But any one watching him closely would have seen that not a movement of these noisy intruders escaped his eagle-like glance.

He knew that Broncho had rallied his pals for the purpose of taking terrible vengeance on the man who had treated him with such scant ceremony.

"Whar is he?" yelled Broncho, the sudden transition from the darkness without half-blinding him. "Whar is he, I say?"

Dandy's shapely white hand crept softly into his breast, but he answered not a word.

Just then Broncho caught sight of the sport, sitting so silently beside the table, a half smile wreathing his thin lips. With a bellow like that of a mad bull he spurred his horse forward, at the same time discharging his weapon.

His followers understanding now whom he was searching for, also began firing, but, owing to the rush of the scared and excited spectators and the fright of the horses their aim was anything but efficient.

Evidently this dangerous play had now proceeded far enough. The Bower was being deserted as rapidly as possible. The dealer had forsaken his post. There could be no further play that night.

With a quick movement a jeweled revolver flashed under the light of the coal oil lamps. Three shots succeeded each other with marvelous quickness. The pony, ridden by Broncho, fell with a bullet in its brain. The lights went out and complete darkness fell upon the scene, under cover of which Dandy leaped to an open window and dropped nimbly to the ground, outside.

A confused uproar came from the saloon, broken at intervals by the pop of revolvers.

"Let them fight it out among themselves," he muttered. "They came with murder in their hearts and the chances are that some of the human brutes will be carried out feet foremost when they leave there. I'd be willing to wager high that the horse has company."

CHAPTER II.

DANDY HAS A CALLER.

THE next morning, while Dandy was putting the finishing touches to his elaborate toilet, he heard a timid knock at the outer entrance.

"Rather early for visitors!" was his mental comment.

Then he gave his neck-tie a final tug and advanced to open the door.

His surprise and astonishment were great. Before him stood a closely-veiled lady—a stranger, too, to judge by her general appearance.

"You are Mr. Keene?" she said, in a voice that seemed to the sport to be marvelously sweet, despite its timidity. "I believe that is the name, though you are oftener known—"

"As the Dandy?" he smilingly interposed. "You have guessed aright. You wish to see me privately, I judge."

He led the way through the hall into the room he had just quitted and placed a chair for her.

His eyes devoured every movement, without seeming to do so; and, under the circumstances, his curiosity was only natural. He lived alone in the rambling structure which he facetiously termed his "den," and, since occupying it, this was his first lady caller. Add to this the extreme earliness of the hour and the fact that the ease and litheness of her movements betrayed that his visitor was young—and probably beautiful—and you have curiosity-prompting qualities that would have stirred a more sluggish brain than Dandy's.

As she seated herself she threw back the heavy veil, revealing a healthful, girlish face, certainly beautiful, framed in golden blonde hair.

Her blue eyes met his rich, dark ones without wavering, and she at once plunged into the subject which had brought her there.

"You are a man of the world, Mr. Keene," with a trustful glance that quite won his heart, "and I come to you because I sorely need the aid of such a man and because I feel that I can repose confidence in you."

Dandy's habitual calm almost forsook him. "I ought to introduce myself first, I suppose!"

handing him a card, displaying in a delicate script the name, Madge Hazelton. "I am a daughter of Buck Hazelton, the cattle-king, who died suddenly about a month ago."

Dandy could not repress a low whistle of astonishment.

"I only learned of his death a week since, and then it was quite accidental. In rummaging among some newspapers that had been cast aside I came upon a dispatch from this place announcing the fact to the world."

"I cannot tell you how pained and shocked I was at the dreadful intelligence. We had been separated very much of the time since my early childhood, but he was my father and I loved him."

"Father was a strange man in many respects, Mr. Keene, as you perhaps know. Possessing almost unlimited wealth, he chose the rugged life of the West, instead of Eastern luxury."

"But that isn't what I came to tell you. I learn that his entire possessions have been seized upon by a woman claiming to be his daughter and only heir. That woman is the wife of Jason Bedrock."

"So I understand!" remarked Dandy, without hazarding an opinion, seeing that she paused as if for a reply.

"Can you tell me anything of her history?" she asked.

"Nothing; except that, until two weeks ago, no one had any reason to suppose Bedrock a married man. Where the lady came from is, I think, not generally known. I take her to be Mexican or Spanish, judging by her looks. She gives out, I believe, that her mother was a Spanish lady. Shortly after the death of Hazelton—after the death of your father, I mean—she put in an appearance here; and, as there were no other claimants to the property, entered into undisputed possession."

"It was announced that she had been married to Bedrock a number of months before, but that the marriage had been kept a secret because of Mr. Hazelton's opposition. The story was plausible, and I never heard it disputed, until now."

"I know that appearances are very much in her favor," Madge Hazelton replied, with a trace of anxiety in her voice, "and that under the circumstances I will have a hard fight to regain my rights."

"Possession is nine points of the law!" Dandy observed, sententiously.

"Yes; and with those nine points against me I need a champion. A man who is not afraid of Bedrock and his influence, which I am told is great."

"Owns about the whole town, figuratively speaking!" said Dandy. "Officials do just about what he tells them to, especially since his recent windfall. Mayor Cavanagh is so completely under his thumb that he's afraid to say his soul is his own."

"I have only been in the town two days, Mr. Keene, but my information and observation lead me to the same conclusion. All the more necessity, therefore, that I should have a powerful champion. To the right man I am willing to pay, or guarantee rather, almost any sum he may think his services worth. Careful inquiry induces me to believe that you, Mr. Keene, are the man I want to look after my interests."

She looked at him sharply, but his impassive features failed to give any clew to his thoughts.

"I visited Mr. and Mrs. Bedrock, immediately after my arrival. I burn with indignation when I think of the reception accorded me. They listened to my story and the presentation of my claims with a fierce and almost savage scorn. I was denounced as an impostor and shown the door, with a warning not to darken it again."

"Seeing that it was useless to appeal to their sense of justice and that I could only right myself by might, or at least by law, aided perhaps by strategy, I wrote you asking an interview."

The recital of her wrongs had brought the color into her usually pale cheeks and made her more radiantly beautiful than ever.

"You wrote to me?" questioned Dandy. "I assure you, Miss Hazelton, I never received the letter!"

"So I presumed. Yet I placed it in the hands of a special messenger."

"Who, may I inquire?"

"The man known as Broncho Ben!"

"The villain!" Dandy muttered under his breath. Light was beginning to break in on him and certain recent occurrences took on new phases of interest.

"Believing you had not received my message, else I would have heard from you," with a trustful glance, "I ventured to call without a previous appointment. I hope you will not think my conduct unladylike."

"On the contrary, you did just right!" he declared, coming out from behind his cloak of reserve, his brown eyes flashing with unwonted fire. "I begin to understand certain things that have seemed rather enigmatical."

"When Broncho stumbled against me last night, with the evident intention of provoking a quarrel, my instant thought was that he had been set on by Bedrock to draw me out of the play, as I was enjoying such an unusual run of luck that it threatened to break the bank."

"I am sorry to have to inform you, Miss Hazelton, that I am little better than a common gambler!"

Dandy said this with some bitterness, and the look which accompanied the words showed plainly that he did not consider it conferred any especial honor on him to be known as "a sport."

To this self-accusation the young lady made no reply.

"Believing such to be Broncho's motives I determined, if possible, to do the very thing he was, as I thought, trying to keep me from doing. You may have noticed that there is a remarkable streak of perversity running through human nature in general. If he had not marshaled his cowboy allies I believe I should have succeeded in my purpose."

"However, after thinking the matter over more calmly, it has seemed almost incredible that one man should seek to murder another for such a paltry reason, and particularly that a man of Bedrock's reputed wealth should seek to do so. What is a thousand dollars or five thousand dollars, more or less, to a man who can count his millions?"

"I knew that Broncho was urged on to the deed; he is a reckless scamp, but lacked any personal motive for attacking me. He is fitted only for a villain's tool, and Bedrock is the villain who owns him."

"Your explanations, and the story of the message which never reached me, convinces me that Bedrock has become alarmed. He came to the instant conclusion that I had taken up your cause. To his evil mind this made it necessary that I should be put out of the way."

Dandy stared thoughtfully at the figured pattern of the carpet and frowned. His mind was busy with the story of Buck Hazelton and his millions. That story had been in the mouths of many, since first his feet had trodden the dusty streets of Dodge. Evidently the mystery with which the millionaire cattle-king had surrounded himself in his life was destined to cling, for a time at least, to his memory.

One reputed daughter in possession of the property and with all the power and influence bestowed by that possession; and here another, claiming to be Hazelton's daughter, asking him to champion her in a battle for her own.

Remembering himself, he looked up, with a pleasant smile, and again his dark eyes encountered those trustful blue ones.

"Can you meet me here again to-morrow?" he asked, more for the purpose of hearing her melodious voice than aught else. "It will be necessary for me to make some investigations and inquiries in order to know what course we ought to pursue. Then you can explain more fully your plans, and we can discuss whatever proof you may have by which to establish your claim as Buck Hazelton's heir. I also may have something of importance to report."

"How can I ever repay you, Mr. Keene?" she exclaimed, a suspicious moisture shining in her glorious eyes. "I was so afraid you might think me a base impostor, as others have done."

His heart-beats perceptibly quickened, at this evidence of her gratefulness, and he there resolved that come what might he would champion her claims to the bitter end. If he had had any doubts of the truthfulness of her story, they vanished like the morning mist.

"Your appearance, Miss Hazelton, gives abundant credence to your words!" he said, by way of delicate compliment. "And as for repaying me—why, we will talk about that another time."

That dark frown again showed on his face, and the thought that if he was not a gambler he might some day ask her hand in payment, flitted painfully through his mind.

Seeing that the interview was at an end, she drew the veil over her face and arose to depart. Dandy would have detained her longer, if he could have hit on any legitimate excuse for so doing. Her beautiful, girlish face and the light of her rare blue eyes had awakened singular emotions in his breast. He had to acknowledge that he was loth to see her go, and was ashamed of himself for the feeling.

"Do not forget our appointment for to-mor-

row morning!" he said, as he gracefully bowed her out. Then, as she turned down the street, he stood watching her, that painful, self-accusing thought again hurrying through his brain.

"Bah!" he at last cried, drawing his eyes away by an effort and returning to his room. "I am becoming as silly and sentimental as a school-girl, and all on account of a pair of blue eyes that I never saw until this morning."

CHAPTER III.

THE PRICKLY PEAR FROM CIMARRON.

JASON BEDROCK, with his hands thrust deep into his pockets, was standing in the door of the Bower, a scowl on his heavy, red face, and an angry light in his evil eyes.

He was perplexed and ill at ease. Broncho had failed in his attempt on the life of Dandy and that failure he feared, boded disaster. The appearance of a claimant to Buck Hazelton's millions was something he had not anticipated. He had been induced to believe that Hazelton had no heir. True, Hazelton had never told him so, for he rarely intrusted his secrets to any one; but the fact that Hazelton had never been visited by a relative during all the years that he had known him had led him into that belief.

Bedrock had his doubts, too, of the genuineness of the claim of the young lady who had swooped down on him so suddenly. He wondered what proofs she possessed and whether or not they were sufficient to establish her title to the property, in the courts. Probably she would attempt to regain her own by the strong arm of might; and Bedrock shifted uneasily on his feet as the calm, impassive face of the Dandy of Dodge loomed before his mental vision.

"Curse the fellow!" he muttered. "If Broncho hadn't been so everlasting slow, he might have laid him out. It takes chain lightning to handle a man o' that kind an' I warned Broncho that he mustn't let the sport git the drop on him."

There was one grain of comfort, however, that solaced him in his musings. Should the case go into the courts he had unbanded influence with the officials and an abundance of money. The judge himself owed his elevation to the position he occupied to Bedrock's clever manipulation of the bummer element of the town.

"He won't dare to go back on me!" he gritted savagely. "If he does I'll make this hyer country too hot to hold him."

Probably the main reason that made him doubt the genuineness of this claim of Madge Hazelton was the fact that his wife had entered into possession of Hazelton's property without the vestige of a right.

Truly he had played a bold hand for those millions. A month previous to Hazelton's sudden death he had prepared the way by secretly marrying this dark-eyed Spanish woman. Then almost before Hazelton was laid in his grave, he had brought this hitherto unknown woman forward, announced to the world their secret marriage, and laid hold of the property in her name.

Some talk had resulted, but as no other claimant was forthcoming this soon died away. He was just beginning to feel secure, when the appearance and demand of Madge Hazelton filled him with fear and anxiety.

As he stood thus gloomily meditating on the dangers which had so suddenly risen in his path a half-drunken cowboy spurred his pony recklessly up the street.

Bedrock's eyes lighted up with pleasure as they fell on this man.

"The very feller I want!" he exclaimed. "That's Tobe Arnold, as certain as guns; and he's worth a half a dozen chuckle-heads like Broncho. And Tobe's got the grit to put through what he undertakes, which I calculate's something."

"Wonder where he's been all these years? The last time I seen him he was in Nevada. Don't guess he ever struck this town before and from the way he's a-yellin' he's evidently tryin' to make a sensation. Sing'lar what fools these cowboys air when they chuck themselves full o' liquor."

"When he's sober Tobe's as level-headed a feller as ever straddled a horse; but jest let him fill up on tanglefoot an' he's ready fer anything."

"As the case stands, though, I'm mighty glad of it. I'll have to bowl him up purty steep, likely, to git him to tackle the little racket I've thought of. He'd be off like a shot if I dared to mention it to him when he's at himself."

"Yes; he's certainly come fer a picnic. Hear him yell!"

Tobe was evidently determined to make himself conspicuous if eccentric actions and a pair of powerful lungs could do it.

"Whoo-oo-oop!" he howled, catching a cap

from the head of a bystander and tossing it into the air, as he urged his horse at full speed up the street. "Hold me, somebody! I'm Tobe Arnold, the Prickly Pear from Cimarron! I'm the Giant from the Neutral Strip! The Howling Terror from the ranges of No Man's Land. Ki-yi-yi-ee!"

"When he gets through with that racket, I'll call him an' have a talk with him. He certainly ought to be glad to see me, fer I done him a big favor once; an' besides I've no idee he knows another man in the place."

Bedrock smiled, as Tobe turned his horse about and endeavored to make it walk on its hind legs.

"He's fuller'n I ever seen him or else he's a-gittin' wilder as he grows older."

Mrs. Bedrock was away, inspecting the late Buck Hazelton's big cattle-ranch on the Pawnee. In order that her movements might be kept a profound secret from the inhabitants of the town she habitually left and entered the place disguised in men's attire.

While Bedrock was watching the drunken antics of Tobe Arnold he saw her ride into view from a side street, just beyond the cowboy's prancing steed.

She was mounted on a small, pied pony; and clattered rapidly down toward the Bower.

As she passed him Tobe gave a snort of disgust and straightened up in his heavy saddle. The slightness of her form, the boyish smoothness of her face and the jaunty way in which she sat the pony excited his risibilities and he determined that here was an opportunity for a lark.

As she dashed past him, he gave an unearthly yell, settled himself firmly in the saddle, jabbed the rowels into the flanks of his big, raw-boned horse and gave chase.

A few bounds brought him up with the pied pony. Seizing it by the tail, he jerked his horse around, and with a dextrous twist, threw the pony sprawling in the street.

Mrs. Bedrock, however, proved herself equal to the emergency. As the pony fell, she disengaged her feet from the stirrups and, before Tobe realized his danger, he found himself looking squarely into the deadly tube of a revolver.

Seeing from the flash of her eyes that she meant to fire, he pulled quickly in on the bridle and the leaden messenger intended for him found lodgment in the brain of his horse.

The horse went down like a log, pinning Tobe's left foot to the ground with its body. Before he could extricate it and regain his feet, Mrs. Bedrock had backed through the open door of the Bower and hurried to her room in the second story.

Tobe was wild with rage. Whipping out his big navy, he dashed after the supposed youth, vowing that he would have his life.

He was met at the door by Jason Bedrock, who had witnessed the entire performance and now interposed his huge bulk between the revengeful cowboy and his intended victim.

"Why, hello, Tobe! Wouldn't run over an old pard, I reckon!" as Tobe came up, panting and foaming and endeavoring to wave him aside.

Tobe halted and rubbed his eyes with his disengaged hand, as if to reassure himself.

"Tain't—tain't Bedrock, is it?" he stammered. "Put 'er there, old pard! Then I'll talk to you, soon's I finish the feller that downed my hoss. Which way'd he go?"

"Come in hyer; I want to talk with you a bit!" said Bedrock, without replying to his question. "The fellow will not leave the house. I'll give you an interduction d'rectly; an' then if you want to shoot him, all right. But I don't think you'll want to."

"Won't I, though!" howled the cowboy, following Bedrock into the bar.

"No; I don't believe you will. Why? Because, Tobe, old pard, *that's my wife!*"

Tobe was so astonished that he reeled and grasped at the bar for support.

"Wh—what's that? Now you're a-jokin' me!"

"Never was more in earnest in my life!" Bedrock assured him, solemnly. "Have a drink! Yes; that's my wife. She's been out to the ranch and rigged up in that kind o' style to keep any one from recognizin' her. I'll pay you well fer your hoss. Saddle's worth somethin', too, I suppose. 'Xpect I'd better git some one to look after it."

"Hyar, John!" to a laborer standing near. "Skin the riggin's off that dead hoss an' bring 'em in hyer. Then have the carkiss drug out an' planted alongside o' that 'un that Dandy keeled over last night."

A silver bell tinkled somewhere in the

depths of the rear apartments. This was a signal that his wife had donned feminine attire; and he now felt at liberty to introduce to her the newly-found friend of whom he hoped to make an ally.

"Have another drink; then I'll present you to Mrs. Jason Bedrock, the handsomest woman in the West—an' the quickest with a gun."

Tobe tossed down the proffered liquor and followed Bedrock through the corridor and into the little room where Mrs. Bedrock was waiting to receive them.

The cowboy, as he stood face to face with the dark-eyed Spanish beauty, could scarcely credit the statement that the death of his horse was due to her.

"This ain't a game, now, to let that feller git away?" he demanded, with savage energy.

A silvery laugh drove the anger out of his face.

"You had no idea, I suppose, Mr. Arnold, that a woman could become a revolver expert!" Mrs. Bedrock replied. "My father made it a great point that I should learn how to ride and shoot. Our life in the West is such a perilous one, you know. Perhaps you were acquainted with my father, Buck Hazelton, the cattle-king?"

Tobe opened his eyes to their fullest extent.

"Ain't many men in the West, ma'am, that hasn't heard of him. Didn't know, though, that he had a darter."

Mrs. Bedrock hastened to convince him on that point; and then regaled him with a series of imaginary incidents from her early life, closing with a highly romantic account of her secret marriage to Bedrock and of the causes that induced them to keep all knowledge of it from Hazelton.

"And now," said Bedrock, "there's another p'int that I want to speak to you on!"

He had been closely watching the cowboy, and his experienced eye told him that the time had arrived when it would be safe to broach the scheme he had formed.

"There's a woman arriv' in this town from no one knows whar. She claims that she is Buck Hazelton's darter and that my wife hyer's a fraud o' the first water. Reedic'l'us, ain't it? An' yet, I'm afeard she's a-goin' to give me a power o' trouble."

"I wouldn't give a snap o' my finger fer all she kin do by herself. But she's backed by Cliff Keene, the Dandy o' Dodge, who, I must say, is about the p'izenest chap that's struck this town lately."

"I engineered a little plan fer layin' him out las' night; but the thing couldn't be worked."

"Why don't you plug 'im yerself, open an' above-board?" Tobe demanded.

"I couldn't do it, without showin' my hand!" Bedrock explained. "An' then it wouldn't do to lay out a man without good an' sufficient reasons, even in Dodge. The officers would be compelled to take notice of anything of the kind."

"If I could draw him into a quarrel an' git the drop on him! But he's so everlastin' quick with his tools that it ain't safe fer any common man to try it. I had Broncho Ben attempt that little game last night; but, as I said, the thing couldn't be worked."

"Now, I have another idee, an' you're jest the man to carry it out. I said to myself, as soon as I seen you, 'that's the very identikal man fer the job.' You ain't afeard of anything; you've got a good head-piece on your shoulders; an' you're cool."

Tobe was not so drunk but that he was susceptible to flattery, and Bedrock knew it.

"I heard you say that you was jest in from the Neutral Strip?"

Tobe nodded assent.

"Well, now, if you could rope this young heifer, that's a-dashin' so recklessly over my range, I'd see that it was the best paid piece o' work you ever done in your life."

"Carry her off to the Neutral Strip an' corral her there, or fix it in any way so that she can't git back. You ketch the drift of what I'm sayin'?"

Again Tobe nodded assent.

"That's all! I'll show you where she stays, an' fix it so's you can git to her room without any trouble. You kin fix the partic'lars to suit yerself."

"When do you want this done?" asked Tobe, straightening up and endeavoring to seem equal to the occasion.

"To-night. She must be got out o' the way before Dandy has time to make a move ag'inst me."

Tobe took another drink, to stimulate his memory.

"To-night it is! I'm the man you want fer any little piece o' work like that. I'm a-thinkin' if Tobe Arnold had 'a' been on hands last night, this hyer Dandy o' Dodge would 'a' had the brandin'-iron put onto him."

CHAPTER IV.

A PLOT THAT MISCARRIED.

WHEN darkness fell, Dandy made his way again to the Bower, nothing daunted by the events of the previous night.

His mind during the day had been filled with thoughts of the lovely young woman who had visited him so unceremoniously during the early hours of the morning.

He had attempted some investigation into the history of Mrs. Bedrock, but had met with scant success. No one in the town had ever seen her until she made her appearance there as the wife of the proprietor of Bedrock's Bower.

A few had been found to question her claim to the wealth of Buck Hazelton. Others, again, believed her to be what she represented herself, Buck Hazelton's daughter and rightful heir. One and all agreed that Jason Bedrock, because of his wealth and influence, was "a bad man to tackle."

It was bravado alone that drew Dandy to the Bower. His ambition to "break" the bank seemed rather ignoble in the light of recent events; and there was now no spurring of anger to drive him on.

He began to half despise himself, and the title of "sport," in which he had once gloried, was rapidly losing its fascination.

The truth is, Dandy was in love. He would not acknowledge the fact, however, even to himself. He fought off the growing conviction with a fierceness that was absolutely bitter. What right had he, he asked himself, to fall in love with a pure-minded, simple-hearted girl? He, the Dandy of Dodge, the prince of sports, the *habitué* of gambling-hells! It was rank folly! Worse, it was madness!

And as these thoughts surged through his mind, there arose a hatred of his calling and a disgust of the record of his past. Sometimes there came also a desire for reformation; and more than once during the day he had caught himself dreaming of a pleasant home with pretty Madge Hazelton as its mistress and queen.

The Bower was thronged with the usual motley array of characters that gathered there. There were no indications of the stormy scenes of the preceding night, except the partially-effaced red blotch on the floor, where Broncho's unfortunate horse had fallen.

Dandy had learned during the day that, contrary to his expectations, no one had been injured in the wild *melee* that followed the sudden shooting out of the lights.

The gaming-tables were crowded. The faro-dealer looked up with an expectant glance as he drew near. But Dandy bought no "chips," and made no bets, although a place was made for him, as if everybody anticipated that he would do so.

He watched the play for a time in a listless manner, then walked over to the bar and entered into conversation with some of the loungers.

Through it all he kept close watch upon the door. He thought it possible that Broncho might make another attempt on his life, and he had no intention of being caught.

But Broncho never came near the Bower, and his watchfulness was wasted labor.

In the same spirit of bravado that had brought him there, he determined to linger till the last lounge had departed, unless, indeed, some of the players should remain all night, which they did frequently. In that event he proposed to remain a sufficient length of time to let Bedrock know that he feared no assault that might be made upon him.

Shortly after midnight the last gamester arose from the table and strode out into the darkness.

Dandy followed, intending to go direct to his room and obtain the rest necessary to enable him to do whatever work might devolve upon him on the morrow.

As he turned the corner of the block just below the Bower, a strange and muffled cry reached his ears.

It came from the house where Madge Hazelton had informed him she had taken lodgings.

Instantly it flashed upon him that some dastardly outrage, instigated by Bedrock, was being perpetrated upon the young lady whose only offense was that she dared boldly claim her own.

Drawing his revolver, Dandy bounded toward the house. There was barely light enough to

enable him to see. As he drew near the outline of a man bearing a struggling burden was faintly revealed.

Again that muffled scream arose on the air. Something gleamed faintly in the starlight and the burden lay on the man's arm like a log.

The reader need scarcely be told that the man was Tobe Arnold and the unfortunate woman he was attempting to abduct was Madge Hazelton.

Tobe was not a bad man in the main, but Bedrock had so befogged his mind with whisky that he was ready for any wild and desperate deed; and when the victim of Bedrock's fiendish plot struggled and attempted to cry out, he had struck her a heavy blow on the head with his revolver.

A half hour before the attempt Bedrock had slipped to the house, unlocked the outer door and the door of Miss Hazelton's room, with skeleton keys. He had then quietly stolen back to the Bower and succeeded in re-entering it without attracting observation.

With the way thus opened for him Tobe had no difficulty, drunk as he was, in reaching the young lady's room. Before she had fairly awakened she was in the street.

When Dandy came upon the scene Tobe was stumbling toward a dark alley where a horse had been placed in waiting.

As the heavy weapon descended, Dandy gave a shout and discharged his revolver with such certain aim that Tobe staggered, reeled and then fell helplessly in the street, his senseless burden slipping from his arm.

Another instant and Dandy had caught up Miss Hazelton and was hurrying with her to his own room. Why he did not bear her into the house from which she had just been taken he could scarcely have explained himself. His movements were guided by intuition and he possibly had a fear that the occupants of the house were concerned in Bedrock's plot.

Dandy had scarcely disappeared when Bedrock with two companions, hurried out of the Bower, attracted by the shot. He guessed at once that Tobe had met with some unexpected difficulty.

He was hardly prepared, however, for the sight which actually met his gaze. Tobe was lying in the dust of the street, with the blood slowly oozing from an ugly bullet wound. Bedrock could not determine in the darkness where the ball had struck him, but that the cowboy was lifeless he had not a doubt.

He was thrown into a transport of furious rage by this evidence that he had once more been balked in his evil schemes.

"Well, the fool's done fer!" he exclaimed, spurning the fallen cowboy with his foot. "He's made a worse mess of it than Broncho would 'a' done. Somebody's been a-layin' fer him. Likely 'twas Dandy. I don't s'pose that even Tobe Arnold would be idiot enough to let that girl git away with him."

"The question now is where's she gone? That's what I'm bound to find out at once."

He turned about, halted and then came back. "Nobody knows this fellow!" he mused. "If I leave him layin' hyer it may set the tongue of some rattlepate to waggin' and the hull thing may come out."

"Here, Sam, Jerry!" he called to his companions, who, having satisfied their curiosity, were proceeding toward the Bower. "Carry this feller down to the river an' dump him in, an' I'll make it worth yer while."

"Ye'll give us a dhrap o' somethin' furst, I suppose, Misther Bedrock?" said the one addressed as Jerry, halting until Bedrock came up with them. "It's a bit o' thravel down to the river, d'ye moind, an' the night air's that cowl'd that I cam' near shakin' me teeth out whiniver I go out intil it."

Bedrock scowled. He was in no mood for joking and jollity, and it offended him because they did not instantly comply with his wishes.

Like many another scoundrel Bedrock kept a number of low villains in his pay, and these were of the number.

However he could not afford to quarrel with them now and so led the way back to the Bower and with as good a grace as possible, complied with their request for liquor.

"Arrah now! who moight the felly be that's layin' in the strate beyant?" questioned Jerry, emboldened by his potations.

Bedrock turned on him with a fierce look.

"What's that to you," he demanded, "if I pay you fer carryin' him off an' keepin' yer mouths shut about it afterwards? It's enough fer you to know that if you don't do the job up strictly accordin' to orders it'll be the worse fer you!"

With this crusher he turned about and the pair hurried into the street, fearful of provoking him into violent anger.

Great was their astonishment on arriving at the place where they had last seen the cowboy lying, to find that he had mysteriously disappeared.

They searched for the body in every direction, even getting down on their hands and poking into all the dark corners. The body could not be found, and after a half-hour's diligent hunt they gave it up as beyond them.

"This hyer thing of a deady body a-walkin' off in that 'ere kind o' style, jest goes a little ahead o' annything I ever heerd on!" exclaimed the one who had answered to the name of Sam, with extreme disgust. "I wonder what the boss 'll say when we go fer to tell him of it?"

"Tell 'im av it, is it?" snorted the Irishman scornfully. "D'ye think I'd be afther tellin' Misther Bedrock annything loike that? If the felly's dead, he's dead. We kin repoort that we carried him down to the river an' chucked 'im in accordin' to orthers. If we towld annything else we'd only be losin' the pay fer the wurruk and resave a blowin' up intil the barg'in."

The Irishman's logic struck the other so favorably that he readily agreed to the plan; and after waiting a reasonable time they wended their way back to the Bower.

And Bedrock readily swallowed their shrewdly concocted lie.

CHAPTER V.

THE DUG-OUT IN THE SAND-HILLS.

A CHAIN of low sand-hills stretches along the southern bank of the Arkansas River.

Hidden away in these hills, not far from the City of Dodge, was a dug-out, its sand-covered roof bearing so close a resemblance to the mounds about it as almost to defy detection.

That it had been recently and hastily built was shown by the appearance of the lumber used in its construction; and that it was intended as a place of concealment was evidenced by its location in that desolate waste of hills, where the foot of man rarely trod.

It is night; and if we could lift the veil of darkness we might see a sentinel here and there in the hills, their attitudes denoting that they are guarding the approaches to the place.

Within the dug-out are seated Madge Hazelton, The Dandy of Dodge and Tobe Arnold, the cowboy.

How came this trio here together?

When Dandy caught up Miss Hazelton, after she had been stricken senseless by her abductor, he hurried with her, as the reader knows, to his own room in the rambling structure which he had denominated his "den."

The distance was not great, and he reached the building at about the same time that Bedrock discovered the miscarriage of his scheme.

Placing the senseless form of the girl upon the bed, he began such restorative measures as he thought would speedily bring her to consciousness.

Dandy, in his knockings about the world, had picked up a useful, if smattering, knowledge of the healing art and he proceeded to put this knowledge into use.

An examination served to show that, while the blow had been a heavy one, it had not apparently fractured the skull and Dandy believed that a few minutes' earnest work would suffice to bring the young lady around, as he expressed it.

In this he was not mistaken, but the result was not all he had hoped for. Miss Hazelton recovered consciousness, but the light of recognition and memory did not come back into her eyes.

He had been unable to wholly check the flow of blood; for the revolver-butt had cut an ugly gash; and her unearthly appearance, as she attempted to arise in the bed, almost chilled the blood in his veins, stout-hearted as he was.

The crimson tide, which dyed her golden blonde hair, had trickled down upon her clothing and upon the coverings of the bed; her face was preternaturally white and drawn; and her eyes had a vacant look, as if the soul had left them.

"I must have fallen down the stairs!" she mused, pathetically. "Oh, how my head hurts!"

She attempted to raise her hand to it.

"If you can lie down and obtain a little rest, you will be better by-and-by!" said Dandy gently.

For the first time she seemed to realize that she was not alone. She looked at him as if looking beyond him.

"Why, it's Mr. Keene! He's a nice gentleman and I believe he'll befriend me. Perhaps

he can tell me where I am. Oh, dear! what can the matter be? My head feels so queer!"

Then raising her voice and addressing him:

"Can you tell me where I am, Mr. Keene? I must have fallen down the stairway."

"You are among friends and perfectly safe!" he assured her. "After you have slept a little you will feel better and then I will tell you how you come to be here. Can I not persuade you to lie down a little while?"

She obeyed him unquestioningly, and nestled among the pillows like a weary child.

Once she looked up and noticing the seriousness of his face, said, in a voice of pitiful pathos:

"I am so glad Mr. Keene is here. I must have fallen down the stairs. Mr. Keene is a real, nice gentleman and it's such a pity that he is a gambler!"

The words went to Dandy's heart like a dagger.

In a few moments she was sleeping quietly and he was beginning to ask himself if it would not be best to call a physician to her assistance. He had refrained, from fear of advising Bedrock as to her whereabouts. The vacant look in her eyes alarmed him.

A lumbering thump was given to the outer door before he determined the question.

Hastening through the hall, he threw the door open and stood face to face with Tobe Arnold.

Dandy recognized him, although he had given scant attention to the cowboy, as the latter lay in the street.

As the light from the lamp, which stood on a table in the room, fell on Dandy's face, Tobe started back, with a surprised exclamation. He was so giddy and weak, however, that he reeled and caught at the side of the door for support.

From the expression on the cowboy's face Dandy judged that he had staggered to the door without knowing who occupied the house.

He also noticed that Tobe was covered with blood and so weak he could scarcely keep his feet.

Naturally he had no kindly feeling for the man who had attempted to abduct and then brutally stricken into insensibility the woman he loved. But however base the man might be he felt that he could not turn him into the street to die.

"Will you come in?" he asked, with as much politeness as he could summon for the occasion.

"You're—you're the man—"

"That shot you? Yes; and would do it again, under like circumstances. But you seem in need of aid, and I endeavor to treasure up no malice. Allow me to help you!"

Tobe gave him an earnest look and then permitted himself to be led into the room occupied by Madge Hazelton.

If his astonishment had been great at meeting Dandy, it became ten times greater as he beheld the victim of his drunken brutality slumbering peacefully on the bed, her fair hair dabbled in blood.

"How did she git hyer?" he gasped, horror-stricken.

"I carried her here!" Dandy replied.

"Yes; I rec'lect, now!" said the cowboy, passing his right hand falteringly across his face. "When you plugged me, I fell. Then, of course, you grabbed her up an' skedaddled."

He cast a shuddering glance toward the bed and then lowered his eyes to the floor.

Dandy noticed that his left arm hung limp and helpless and he was reminded of the cowboy's wounded condition.

"You are bleeding!" he said. "Let me help you off with your coat and I'll see what I can do to stop the blood."

Tobe attempted to arise, but fell back in his chair.

Judging by this that the wounded man was becoming constantly weaker, Dandy drew a keen-bladed knife and unceremoniously ripped the coat from his shoulders.

"Ah! I see. The ball struck you in the left shoulder. A ragged hole, that. If I had a probe, now?"

He was running his fingers softly over the wound.

"No probe is needed; which is lucky, as I haven't one. The ball passed clean through. That pistol of mine shoots as hard as a young cannon."

He rolled the shirt down over the shoulders, tore some cloth into strips, and proceeded to apply a bandage.

"That's an ugly-looking place, and you have lost a good deal of blood. I don't believe, though, that it's anything serious. You'll have a bad shoulder for awhile, and you'll be mighty

weak, probably; but you'll come around all right in the course of time. The ball struck low, and I can't discover that there are any bones broken. A couple of inches to the right and a little further down and you would never have raced another steer over the range."

Tobe ground his teeth and winced, as Dandy worked and talked; but he showed no impatience and never spoke of the pain he evidently felt.

"There, I think that will fix you!"

Dandy rose to his feet and surveyed the result with a satisfied air.

"Now, let me get you a glass of brandy. You need something to brace you up; and, besides, I want to ask you some questions."

When Tobe had swallowed the brandy, Dandy seated himself opposite, and fixing his eyes keenly on the cowboy, proceeded, bit by bit, to draw out the story of the attempted abduction.

"Bedrock's at the bottom o' the hull thing!" Tobe declared, self-reproachfully, casting another hasty glance toward the bed.

"So I suppose!" was Dandy's curt rejoinder.

"I wouldn't 'a' gone into the thing at all ef I hadn't been crazy drunk. After they'd filled me up with tanglefoot and fairy stories I was jest fool enough for anything!"

"Who do you mean by they?"

"Why Bedrock an' his wife. Bedrock saved my life onc't, when a sneakin' coyote had the drop on me; an', of course, I naterally felt friendly toward him."

"I believe now that his story about his wife bein' the darter o' Buck Hazelton is a lie."

"What has brought about such a decided change in your opinions?"

It was evident that Dandy did not fully trust the cowboy even yet.

"His bein' so 'tarnal' feared o' the gal yender!"

Tobe jerked his right hand toward the bed.

"If he felt that he was in the right o' the thing he wouldn't be attemptin' any underhand games. I was too drunk to think about that at the time."

"About the young lady! What were you to do with her?" Dandy asked.

"Carry her into the Cimarron country, an' see that she didn't git back ag'in."

"Murder her, I suppose, if necessary?"

"I calc'late that's about the size of it, though Bedrock didn't put it jest that way."

"And Mrs. Bedrock consented to such a fiendish plan as that?"

"She most sart'inly did!" Tobe responded, and then proceeded to give a succinct account of how he came to meet Bedrock and of all that was said and done by the villainous pair.

"I s'pose Bedrock tipped her the word, as she backed into the saloon after downing my hoss, an' she hatched out them fairy stories while she was changin' her clo'es."

Dandy drummed thoughtfully on the table as Tobe concluded.

"There's one other thing I want to speak about!" continued Tobe, with a regretful glance at the sleeper.

"Bedrock thinks I'm dead. That bit o' lead, while it knocked me crazy fer a minnit er two, nighabout sobered me. Bedrock come out to where I was a-layin', and, while he was spurrin' me with his boot an' a-swearin' at me fer bein' a lunkhead, I come to."

"His words wasn't soundin' overly friendly toward yours truly, an' I thinks to myself mebber I'd better keep shady an' find out what he had to say."

"My shoulder wasn't a-hurtin' very much then, an' I was jest sober enough to be cunnin'."

"Well, I found out that he'd been makin' a drunken tool out o' me; an' that as fer Tobe Arnold himself he didn't care anything, on'y so fur as he could use him."

"An' then he wanted them fellers to chuck me into the river. Act'illy feed me to the fishes, as ef I wasn't any better than a cow."

"Thinks I to myself, Tobe, ef that's the kind o' frien's you've got hyer, you'd better stampede; an' as soon as them fellers went to likker up, I hauled my carkiss away from there."

"You may know that I don't feel very good toward Jason Bedrock after that; an', besides, I feel like I'd ort to do somethin' to kinder pay fer what I done to the gal yender. So, if they's anything I kin do to help down Bedrock I'd like to be counted in; fer, frum what the old rascal said, I figger that's about the lay you're on."

There was an earnestness in the cowboy's tones that convinced Dandy of his entire sincerity.

"I think you can aid me," he replied, returning Tobe's anxious look.

"And now, I must find you a place to sleep."

The house has plenty of rooms in it, but they are rather unfurnished. You are used to roughing it, though, like myself, and can put up with almost anything, and I suppose will not object to sleeping in the hall with me.

"Miss Hazelton was rather wandering in her mind before she fell asleep, and I want to be within easy call."

"I don't like the idea of her remaining alone in the house with us. It don't look well, and yet I don't know what else to do."

"I've been thinking pretty lively since you came, and, as we're to be pardis in our efforts in her behalf, I don't mind telling you that I don't want Bedrock to find out what's become of her."

"I also believe it will be a good idea to let him cherish the belief that you are dead. We may be able to give him some pretty surprises, after we get our plans laid."

As Madge was still sleeping peacefully, he helped Tobe into the hall. There he arranged a pallet on which both rested, without disturbance, until morning.

When Miss Hazelton unclosed her eyes the next day she seemed to have almost recovered from the effects of the blow. But her eyes retained that soulless, far-away look.

Dandy, becoming alarmed for her condition, and yet unwilling to call a physician and thus run the risk of revealing her whereabouts to Bedrock, decided on a bold course.

He had lumber conveyed by stealth into the sand-hills, and two days later the secret dug-out was ready for occupancy.

The flitting took place by night. Horses, with stretchers swung hammock-like, between them, were got in readiness by trusty hands and Miss Hazelton and Tobe were conveyed silently and stealthily across the shallow river.

Dandy had many stanch friends in the town, and it had been no difficult matter to obtain the assistance of men on whose courage and fidelity he could implicitly rely.

CHAPTER VI.

THE LEAGUE OF THREE.

THE men who had assisted Dandy thus far were now retained as sentinels, with instructions to guard the approaches to the place and prevent a surprise.

In addition to this duty, the labor of conveying provisions from the town and water from the river fell upon them. They found the water so turbid that it was necessary to filter it before it was fit for use.

They made their visits to the town after night-fall, and took every possible precaution to avoid suspicion and protect the secret of the existence of the dug-out.

The lack of improvement in Madge Hazelton's mental condition distressed Dandy greatly.

She seemed to have sunk into a state of apathy from which it was impossible to arouse her.

She recognized Dandy and seemed to regard him as being in some manner her protector. Occasionally she addressed him. As a rule, however, she never spoke to any one directly, unless questioned; but she retained the trick of looking at persons as if really looking beyond them and communing to herself about their characteristics and qualities.

She exhibited no curiosity and moved about the little, underground apartment as if it were the most natural thing in the world for her to be there.

On one or two occasions Dandy attempted to draw from her some revelations of her past life. The result more than ever startled and pained him. He discovered that she possessed no past. Her memory, touching the events of her personal history, seemed a total blank.

And yet she remembered snatches of songs that she had doubtless been accustomed to sing in the old days. Her voice was wondrously clear and sweet. But its liquid tones had a wavering vagueness that reminded Dandy of "sweet bells jangled out of tune."

As for Bedrock and his wife they were to her as if they never had been.

Much as he regretted the necessity Dandy was at last forced to the conviction that he must seek medical advice and aid.

How to accomplish this without revealing the young lady's condition and whereabouts to Bedrock or his minions was what puzzled him.

At last he hit upon the plan of calling a physician from a distance, and enjoining upon him the strictest secrecy.

Fortunately he was acquainted with a young medical man of high standing and character, in an Eastern city.

With Dandy to think was to act, and the next

night train from Dodge City carried him eastward.

Three nights later he returned. In the coach which bore him was a young Texas cattleman, a bluff, hearty fellow, who talked much of his herds and his ranges.

The cattleman also alighted at Dodge. Shortly after, he met Dandy near the river. They forded the stream, by means of horses, which they found in waiting; and, on arriving at the dug-out, Dandy introduced the cattleman as Dr. Philip Elliott, the expected physician.

When he had examined Madge Hazelton's injuries, he endeavored to draw her into conversation; but received only monosyllabic replies.

He shook his head gravely, as he walked out with Dandy.

"I am sorry that I can not make a favorable report, my dear Keene!" he said, with some feeling. "It is a remarkable case. When you told me her story I thought it possible that a piece of the frontal bone had been driven down upon the delicate tissues of the brain and that an operation would correct the trouble."

"I must be frank with you. I can not longer hold out that hope. There is no fracture or indentation that I can discover. The wound is healing nicely. Her condition therefore must be attributed largely to mental shock."

"She may recover the use of her faculties in a day or a week, and she may live for years in her present condition."

"In such a case medical skill is little better than a broken reed. I will do everything I can for her, however, and we will hope for the best."

"Is it so bad as that?" Dandy questioned, in a choked and agitated voice.

Elliott looked at him pityingly. Evidently he had read the secret of Dandy's heart.

"Remember that I have not said there is no hope. Miss Hazelton's present condition was produced by a shock. Some similar shock might restore her. Then again she may recover in a few days, without any apparent cause."

"When do you expect Mrs. Bickford?" Dandy asked, abruptly.

"She will be here to-morrow, probably. Mrs. Bickford is an excellent lady and one of the most skillful nurses I ever met. In engaging her I remembered your injunction, also, to secure some one who would make the young lady an excellent companion, as well as a good nurse."

"I am glad she is coming so soon!" Dandy exclaimed. "I don't like to surround Miss Hazelton wholly with men."

Tobe came out, at this juncture, and joined them.

His left arm was suspended in a sling. His face was white and bloodless and he was evidently still quite weak.

"What a pity it is that I didn't learn more about Miss Hazelton's history, before this sad occurrence deprived her of memory!" Dandy observed, addressing both. "I shall never forgive myself for the neglect."

"By a little judicious questioning at the proper time I might have learned everything; but, she seemed diffident and timid and I let the opportunity slip by. I must confess, also, that my selfish desire to obtain a second interview influenced me largely."

"That desire led me to leave a large number of things unexplained, so that I might have an excuse for asking her to make a second call. Of course I took pains to prevent her from understanding my motives; and, to lead her astray in that respect, I stated that it would be necessary for me to make certain inquiries, and advised another meeting, at which we might compare notes and lay our plans for the future."

Dandy's face, revealed by the silvery moonlight, showed the keenness of his pain. But his agony could not possibly have been keener than that felt by Tobe Arnold. He was the picture of mute despair.

He could not forget that he had struck the blow that had reduced an innocent and helpless girl to a condition bordering on imbecility.

It was in vain that he attempted to lay the blame upon Bedrock and upon the liquor he had drunk, and to assure himself that, if sober, he would never have been led into the commission of so foul a crime. He could not escape the conviction that his own dissolute conduct had placed him in a condition to become the prey of schemers; and that, therefore, he was morally responsible for the outrage he had committed and the distress and suffering it had entailed.

"The great trouble is," said Dandy, after a silence of several minutes, "that we haven't the slightest clew to start with. I do not even know where Miss Hazelton's home is. I have been told that she arrived on a westward bound

train and we may therefore presume that her home is east of here. But the East is a large place; and we might as well call that no clew at all.

"I have thought it possible that she may have, at some time, attended one of the many colleges for females with which that section abounds; and certain inquiries are now being prosecuted along that line that may open up a trail.

"Buck Hazelton was certainly a singular man, from all I can learn. He seems to be buried himself among his ranches, and to have had no ambition or desire beyond that of accumulating wealth.

"We know now that he had a family, or, at least, a daughter; but no one here dreamed of such a thing until Mrs. Bedrock appeared and put in a claim to his wealth.

"My own opinion is that Bedrock believed Hazelton had no heirs, and so thought it perfectly safe to claim those millions on behalf of his wife."

"The case is certainly a singular one, and surrounded with a great deal of mystery!" said the doctor, who had been giving close heed to his friend's revelations.

"From what you say, I judge it will be folly to try to oust Mrs. Bedrock by process of law. I am perfectly convinced of the justness of Miss Hazelton's claims, and believe Bedrock and his wife to be a precious pair of swindlers.

"The great point is to prove it. Evidence that might bring conviction to our individual minds would not be worth a feather's weight in the courts."

"I have been giving that point due consideration, doctor," Dandy replied. "Bedrock has possession and unbounded influence. As matters now stand, we would imperil Miss Hazelton's interests by commencing an action. My opinion is that we must resort to strategy. Meet scheme with scheme, and overthrow Bedrock on his own grounds."

"Now ye'r a-talkin'!" exclaimed Tobe. "My motto's allers been to fight the devil with fire. That's the on'y way you kin down a man like Bedrock. Why, he'd spend the last cent o' Hazelton's money to beat you, an' ef you won you'd on'y git an empty nest. He'd sell every huff off o' the ranges to buy up the judges an' the lawyers, ef he had to do it."

"That could be prevented by an injunction!" observed Elliott, thoughtfully, as if pondering the matter.

"That shows that you don't know anything about the West!" was Tobe's instant reply. "Praps the trick could be worked whur you come from, but not hyer. Every huff would be in No Man's Land er the Panhandle afore one o' these pesky off'sers could turn 'round twic't."

"Tobe is right," said Dandy. "Then you may count me in," declared Elliott, earnestly. "If it is to be scheme against scheme, and wit against wit, I think we can show Jason Bedrock some points that will make him stare."

He gave Dandy his hand in token of his sincerity.

"The same hyer!" cried Tobe, extending his good right hand. "I owe Bedrock a turn, an' it'll do me a power o' good to git a chance to pay it."

Dandy wrung the hands that had been extended. And thus was sealed the compact of the League of Three.

CHAPTER VII.

THE MAN FROM MISSOURI.

BRONCHO BEN'S reputation as a "chief" suffered considerable impairment as a result of his disastrous encounter with Dandy. He lost the respect of the "tough" element of the town, and felt that he was also in bad odor with Bedrock.

He was too useful to the latter, however, to be held off at arm's-length for any considerable time. After he had sat under the shadow of Bedrock's displeasure for about two weeks, he was welcomed back into that individual's pay and confidence.

He could not so easily regain his reputation as a fighting man. There were many men in the town who rejoiced over his downfall, for a bully is feared rather than respected, and these took exceeding great pains to keep alive the memory of his discomfiture.

But Broncho was slowly recovering his spirits. The swagger and strut came back to his gait, and his voice began to take on its old-time below and fierceness.

He professed to be a cowboy, but no one ever knew of his acting in that capacity. No cattleman ever thought of offering to employ him.

He never engaged in any of the round-ups—unless it was rounding-up a party of "tenderfeet" for the gamblers to pluck.

The cowboy role was simply a cloak that served as an excuse for the drunken bouts and pugilistic encounters in which he delighted. Rather large license was given to the cowboy element, and behind this license he sheltered himself. His assumption also gave him opportunities for obtaining an influence over that class, by appealing to the fraternal feeling which exists upon the range.

The great spring round-up, on the ranges contiguous to Dodge, was over. The cowboys, released from their exhausting labors, and with well-filled pockets, were pouring into the town like a living tide.

It had been heralded far and near that, at the close of the general round-up, a great bullfight would take place in Dodge, and not a ranch from Nebraska to Texas but was represented in the crowd that surged and raced and shouted up and down those streets.

Such an opportunity for spreading abroad a reputation as a "chief" might never occur again, and Broncho Ben was not backward about improving it.

Mounted on an agile pony he dashed here and there, firing his revolver into the air and belowing like a bull of Bashan. He was a practiced rider, and some of the capers he indulged in would not have disgraced the sawdust arena. But he hesitated to attack any of those strangers, not knowing but that he might run against a rock.

After a time the opportunity for which he had been waiting seemed to present itself. A man, who had most decidedly the appearance of a tenderfoot, came sauntering slowly down the street, staring open-mouthed at the wonders about him.

His large hands were thrust into the wide pockets of a shabby pair of jean pants. His shoes were heavy and dust-covered, as if he had walked a long distance. The rim of his hat was turned under at the sides to hold it down upon his shaggy hair; a dilapidated coat clung to his powerful shoulders, while a torn flannel shirt, open at the throat, revealed a chest of massive solidity.

Broncho gave a whoop of satisfaction, as his eyes fell upon this green-looking stranger. Here was an opportunity for attracting especial attention to himself, without the risk of having a lead-mine started beneath his epidermis.

Settling himself firmly in the saddle, he spurred his horse forward, coiling his *riata* as he did so. As he neared the stranger he swung the rope two or three times about his head and launched it. The long lasso shot out, like an uncoiling serpent, and the noose settled gracefully and firmly over the man's shoulders.

"Hol' on! Hol' on!" shouted the tenderfoot, deftly whipping out a knife and severing the rope. "What'd ye take me fur, anyway? Must 'a' thought I war one o' them long-legged steers that go rampagin' aroun' the parairers. Never see sich a crazy lot o' fellers! Jest back thar a feller axed me ef my name warn't Billy Rag-bag; and now this 'ere chap takes me fur a cow!"

He shoved his hat back with the big, brawny hand that held the knife and stared at Broncho, with an owl-like gravity that quite disconcerted the latter.

"What made you cut that lariat?" Broncho demanded, fiercely. "I use that fer a picket-rope, an' now I'll have to set up all night and hold my hoss, to keep him frum runnin' away."

"Sho!" exclaimed the stranger. "Now you don't r'ally mean that, do you? Pears to me you mout tie yer hoss to a fence somewhar's."

Broncho screamed with delight. There was not, with the exception of an occasional corral or cattle-chute, a fence within fifty miles. Evidently he had struck a splendid subject for guying.

"Er you mout tie 'im out in the bresh," the tenderfoot continued. "Thet 'ere's the way we do in Missouri, when we go ter a jamboree. A green saplin's the best, an' I'd vise ye to look fur one thet's springy; then yer hoss won't be so apt ter break his halter-strap!"

"Say, ole man, what's yer name?" Broncho asked, wiping the tears of laughter out of his eyes. "You're a specimen, you air, an' I'd like to know yer handle."

The stranger ran him over with that owlish look, as if he half-suspected he was being made the butt of some joke.

"Me? Wal, my name's Leatherlungs! George Washington Leatherlungs, frum Persimmon Holler, State o' Missouri! Hear me how!"

He leaped into the air, threw back his shoul-

ders and gave a yell that echoed like the blast of a fog-horn, and drew about the pair a crowd of cowboys and loungers.

"You'd ort to take to the stage!" Broncho cried, approvingly. "You'd make your fortin afore the foot-lights, as a high-kicker, you would. I s'pose you kin sing? A man with a voice like that ort to sing like a medder lark; an' singin's one o' the requirements made o' strangers comin' into this country."

A look of pride mantled Leatherlungs's sunburned face.

"Now, ye'r a-bittin' me right whar I live! Thar ain't a man, woman er child in Persimmon Holler kin sing like Leatherlungs, G. W. Ain't got ary brass band around to accompany me, hev you. I'm ruther uset to singin' with music, an' don't know sca'sely how to pitch a tune 'thout it. M'lindy used ter 'company me on the 'cordeon, but I reckon a brass band 'd do!"

"The band boys got stuck on ther scen'ry an' ain't arriv' yit!" said a bystander. "There's a railway ingine a-tootin', though, and you kin pitch by thet, likely."

Leatherlungs cocked his head sideways, inclined his ear toward the whistling locomotive and began, in a voice that had some melody in it, and indicated a pair of powerful lungs:

"My name it is Joe Bowers,
I have a brother Ike;
I'm jest frum old Missouri,
An' on my way to Pike!
The reason why I left them—
My fricn's an' kindred there;—
Was Sally married a butcher,
And the butcher had red hair!"

The song, which was of almost interminable length was greeted with uproarious applause.

Leatherlungs then volunteered to dance for them, if Broncho would furnish the music. Not being a singer, Broncho whistled the "Arkansaw Traveler" and "Money Musk," and the tall Missourian went through a series of nimble capers, to the intense delight of the spectators.

"Now, gen'lmen, I've done my best to entertain ye, an' I hope as how you'll feel kind enough to listen ter what I've gct to say."

"I'm a stranger hyer, I am; an' I'm free to say things ain't jest as they air back to Persimmon Holler."

"To come to the p'int: I want ter be a cowboy. I'm as stout as a boss, an' I kin ride like a Injun. Is thar airy gen'lman hyer would like to hire sech a man?"

"Don't reckon you could tell a quirt from a brandin'-iron?" said Bedrock, who had been drawn into the crowd by the singing.

"Don't know as I could!" Leatherlungs acknowledged. "But I've been practicin' with a lasser, back ter the Holler. Pitched it at a stump fer awhile, then tackled the ole gander. Got so I could lass' him every whack. Worried the ole feller so much that he squawks now, ev'ry time that he sees a rope."

He laughed lightly at the remembrance, and again looked around the circle of faces to see if any one was inclined to hire him.

"What else kin you do?" asked Bedrock. "I'm a cattleman, an' mebbe we might make a trade."

"I kin throw the biggest bull thar is on the perary!"

"With a pistol-ball!"

There was a sneer in Bedrock's words.

"No; with my naked han's!"

"Don't b'lieve it, hey?" as Bedrock's lips curled in doubt.

"Tell you what I'll do: Thar's a-goin' to be a bull-fight hyar to-morrer; an' some gen'lmen from Mexico will tempt to down the wu'st specimens you've got, in reg'lar bull-fighter style."

"Now, I ain't no bull-fighter, but I'll throw anything in the cow line that you kin trot out, pervidin' you'll hire me to work fer you, afterward."

It was a fair proposition, and Bedrock agreed to it.

"It's a bargain, then, is it?" Leatherlungs asked, extending his brawny hand.

"Who runs the shebang over thar?"

He nodded toward the Bower.

"I am the proprietor o' that establishment!" Bedrock answered, with perceptible pride.

"You be?"

Leatherlungs stared, as if dumfounded. Then a smile slowly irradiated his face.

"As the Guv'nor o' North Car'l'ny said to the Guv'nor o' South Car'l'ny: 'It's a long time between drinks! Le's go an' likker. Come on, boys, it's the gen'lmen's treat!'"

A roar of laughter went up, and Bedrock frowned.

The cowboys, however, became clamorous,

notwithstanding the frown; and, seeing no convenient way out of the predicament, Bedrock led the way to the Bower and smilingly set out the liquor.

CHAPTER VIII.

A GALA DAY IN DODGE.

DODGE CITY was in the full glory of holiday attire. The buildings were gayly decorated with flags and bunting, and sprigs of evergreen, brought from far-away mountain slopes, were seen over many doorways.

The decorations at the Bower were especially gorgeous. Rows of Chinese lanterns hung in brilliant loops along the walls, and swung from the windows of the upper story. The bar and the gaming-tables were almost hidden by wreaths of cedar, and the bottles and glasses exhibited a luster and transparency they had seldom shown.

Crowds of horsemen and pedestrians streamed constantly through the principal streets, presenting in their faces and dress a cosmopolitan array not often seen in so small a place.

In addition to the cowboys and sports, there were tenderfeet from the States East, Indians from the Territory, Mexicans, with their dark eyes and swarthy faces, and a full complement of almond-eyed Celestials.

With such a crowd, and on such a day, it is needless to say that Broncho was in the height of his glory, and took advantage of unnumbered tricks and arts to attract the attention of the motley throng.

After visiting and patronizing the saloons and places of public resort, the spectators usually wended their way toward the river.

There, in the wide valley of the Arkansas, an immense amphitheater, with a bull-pit in its center, had been constructed.

The bulls were already in their cages, and were filling the air with their mad bellowings and pawings. They were fierce and vicious brutes, wild as untamed buffaloes, and had been brought from remote ranges, where they had scarcely ever been permitted the sight of man.

Certainly they had never before seen the human biped on foot. Whenever these monsters had appeared to them, which was seldom, they had come as charging and yelling centaurs.

It is not strange, then, that an angry bull would occasionally make a vindictive dash against the bars of his cage, whenever some curious individual ventured too near it.

When the morning train arrived from the East, the crash of a brass band added its musical din to the tumult that was already raging. It was not the band which the cowboy alleged had "got stuck on the scen'ry," and delayed. That was only a pleasant fiction. This band was a blaring reality, ordered from Kansas City to do honor to this festive occasion.

Shortly after noon the boisterous crowd commenced gathering in the vast amphitheater, which was soon filled almost to the point of suffocation. But the throng was good-humored, and accepted the necessary crowding as a matter of course, and made of it the subject of innumerable jests.

A raised platform had been built above the heavy board wall that separated the tiers of seats from the bull-pit. This was occupied by the dignitaries and principal men of the place. Prominent among them was the burly form of Jason Bedrock, the proprietor of Bedrock's Bower.

Bedrock being recognized as the wealthiest man in the place—by virtue of Buck Hazelton's millions—had been selected to do the honors of the occasion.

Now rising from his seat on the platform, he bowed blandly to the assembled multitude. He was in unwonted good humor. The dark clouds that had recently gathered above his head seemed breaking away. Dandy appeared to have dropped his antagonism and was now seldom noticed in his usual haunts.

The mysterious disappearance of Madge Hazelton troubled him somewhat at first. Her long silence served to reassure him, however, and he was beginning to believe more than ever that she was an impostor. Probably the attempted abduction had so frightened her that she had abandoned her object and quitted the place.

An instant hush fell upon the throng as Bedrock rose in his place.

"The honor you have conferred on me, fellow-citizens," he said, waving his hands impressively, "is more than I was expectin'. We air gathered hyer fer the purpose o' celebratin' the close o' the round up, with the greatest bull-fight on record. When the fun commences I ask that there be no stampedin'. Gen'lemen will please to keep their pistols in their pockets. No stand-

in' on the seats and yellin, an' keep yer hats off, so's the ladies kin see.

"I now have the pleasure o' interducin' the gen'lemen who air hyer to amuse us, Leon Garcia an' Jose Manuel, of Santa Fe, who air counted about the toughest bull-fighters in the hull South-west."

The band struck a lively air, and Garcia and Manuel leaped nimbly into the arena and bowed low to the crowd.

Their appearance was greeted by wild shouts and cheering, notwithstanding Bedrock's prohibition of such demonstrations.

The Mexicans were gaudily attired. They were accompanied by two *bandilleros*, whose duty it was to plant short javelins in the shoulders of the bulls, for the purpose of irritating them, and to distract the attention of the animals by waving scarlet cloaks before their eyes whenever the fighters became hard pressed.

When the blaring of the band had ceased, a bull was released from one of the cages. It leaped into the arena with a vicious bellow, and before its eyes had fairly become accustomed to the light, was set upon by the *bandilleros*, who reduced it to a state of perfect frenzy in a few minutes' time.

Garcia then placed himself in front of the maddened animal and waved a scarlet *serape* to attract its attention. With a bellow that seemed almost a scream, it charged the daring man. He waited until its long, cruel horns almost touched him, then, with a smile on his face, lightly stepped aside, allowing the maddened animal to waste its fury on the unheeding wind.

Again and again was this repeated, the bull becoming more enraged at each unsuccessful charge.

Having played with it a sufficient length of time Garcia gave a quick forward thrust, as it passed him, and the bull fell, mortally wounded, the short sword piercing its heart.

It was instantly dragged out, and another released from a cage, when the same performance was substantially gone through with, Manuel alternating with Garcia in the attacks.

When the bull-fighters had finished, loud calls arose for Leatherlungs.

"Show yerself, Missouri! The ladies want to look on your handsome phiz!" Bedrock cried, raising his voice so that it swept the entire circle of the amphitheater.

Instantly the gaunt form of the Missourian arose into view near the opening by which the bulls had been admitted.

At the same time a bull, larger and fiercer-looking than any that had preceded it dashed into the inclosure.

Leatherlungs leaped the high board wall with remarkable ease for a man of his large and powerful frame.

Advancing in front of the platform on which Bedrock sat, he doffed his ridiculous hat and, bowing low, asked, in a voice that rose above the bellowings of the bull:

"Ef I down that 'ere critter, ba'r-handed I'm to have a job as cowboy?"

This brought forth an explanation from Bedrock, who was delighted at every opportunity of addressing that boisterous crowd.

When the terms of the agreement had been plainly stated, Leatherlungs turned quietly about and walked coolly toward the bull, which stood at an angle of the wall, eying him fiercely.

At this the bull darted from its retreat, lowered its long, tapering horns and made a murderous dash.

Leatherlungs stepped quickly to one side, as he had seen the bull-fighters do. Then, as the animal turned for another charge, he leaped rapidly forward and with a nimble bound gained its back.

A scream of delight burst from the spectators. The bull, bewildered and maddened by this novel procedure, dashed wildly about the arena. Finding it impossible to dislodge its rider in that way it made a furious assault on the stout wall, then dug its horns into the sand so ferociously that it lost its equipoise and fell over on its side with a resounding thump.

Leatherlungs alighted with great agility and, when the animal staggered to its feet, made another cat-like leap and regained his position on its back.

This was too much, and the now thoroughly frightened brute tore around the ring with almost lightning speed.

While its rush was swiftest Leatherlungs leaped to his feet with the greatest ease and, balancing himself as dextrously as any circus-rider, stood upright and rode smilingly around the ring, while a perfect torrent of encouraging yells arose from the multitude.

As if this was not enough, Leatherlungs balanced himself first on one foot and then on the other; then placed one foot on the animal's shoulders and the other between its horns and gave a roaring rendition of the first verse of "Joe Bowers," swinging his shabby hat as an accompaniment.

A perfect pandemonium of applause greeted him as he leaped to the ground and stood bowing, hat in hand. Never had such a performance been witnessed even in the lively little city of Dodge, where remarkable feats were by no means frequent.

The bull-fighting was relegated to the shade and Leatherlungs became the hero of the hour.

While the tumult was at its highest, a cowboy, after a hasty conference with his mates, mounted his horse and dashed off to the town, returning in a few minutes at a thundering gallop.

Scarcely any one noticed the movements of the cowboy, as all eyes were riveted on Leatherlungs, eager to see what he would do next. Not a doubt existed now, in the minds of any, that he would be able to make good his boast.

Leatherlungs had replaced the worn shoes which he removed from his feet before attempting the riding tricks just mentioned; and, while the tumult lasted, stood with his back to the wall watching the movements of the bull.

The animal was evidently much blown and dispirited and seemed in no hurry to renew the attack.

As Leatherlungs advanced on it, however, it lowered its horns and made another charge.

When the tips of the broad horns were within a few feet of his body, he leaped suddenly into the air, planted one heavy shoe squarely between its eyes and grasped a tapering horn in either hand.

For one instant it seemed that the daring man must be borne down by the impetuosity of the rush.

Then the foot that was free struck the ground, the bull's head was jerked about, one horn was pressed downward against the earth with a strength that was simply herculean, and the heavy animal fell with a terrific crash and lay as if lifeless, with its head bent partly under its body.

The sharp horn had been thrust deeply into the earth and it had been thrown simply by the momentum of its charge. But what muscular power had it not taken to force that horn against the ground and hold it there!

Another round of deafening applause greeted Leatherlungs as he arose to his feet, and again stood, hat in hand, smilingly bowing.

After a little the bull, whose neck seemed to be a combination of india-rubber and iron, staggered to its feet, gave its head a dissatisfied shake and hurried into an angle, from which it evidently had no notion of again venturing.

"R'a'y seems as ef all that practicin' I done with a lasser, back to Persimmon Holler, was throwed away," Leatherlungs smilingly observed, as he advanced toward the grand stand.

Seeing that there was now no danger from the bull, which had had all the fight taken out of it, apparently, Bedrock boldly descended into the circus to greet this strange tenderfoot who had so suddenly made of himself a popular hero.

As his feet touched the sand, a gorgeously-appointed and costly saddle was dropped at his side.

"Gen'lemen," he said, facing the multitude with an air of pride, "this is the happiest an' proudest moment o' my life. The gen'lman who has so well done what he agreed to is, I am pleased to see, hired into the service o' Jason Bedrock, fer as long as he wants to stay there."

"This hyer saddle," turning to Leatherlungs, "has been presented to you by yer many frien's, as a token o' their esteem an' appreciation o' sech a man as you have showed yerself to be."

He handed the saddle to the astounded Leatherlungs, who was evidently much more in need of a good suit of clothing, and turned again to the audience.

As he ran his eyes along the tiers of faces, his countenance blanched, his knees shook and he staggered back with a wild cry.

The pale, drawn face of Tobe Arnold glowered at him from the nearest circle.

"My God! kin the dead come to life?" Bedrock shrieked, in an excess of terror, as he fell, half-fainting, upon the sand.

The commotion that followed was indescribable. Men hurried here and there, calling to each other to know what it meant, women screamed and Mrs. Bedrock swooned dead away.

Leatherlungs was the first to reach Bedrock's prostrate form.

"What is it, ole man?" he asked, anxiously. "There—there! Don't you see him? Tobe Arnold, the man that was killed t'other night."

Bedrock scrambled to his feet and glared wildly at the spot where that glowering face had been. It was no longer visible.

He drew his hands falteringly across his eyes and looked again. The people had for the greater part resumed their seats, many of them half-doubting his entire sanity, as the name of Tobe Arnold, and the circumstances attending his supposed death, were wholly unknown to the citizens of Dodge.

Bedrock began to doubt if he had really seen the face. Noticing the curious looks directed toward him, he shook off the detaining hand of Leatherlungs, and with brain reeling made his unsteady way toward the stand, up the steps of which he had to be assisted, for he seemed as helpless as if deeply intoxicated.

CHAPTER IX.

THE PHI CATTLE-RANCH.

THE delight of Leatherlungs was unbounded, as he sat in his gorgeous saddle, astride of one of Bedrock's ponies. His desire to be a cowboy was in a fair way of being realized.

As he rode up and down the street in front of the Bower, surrounded by an admiring group, he gave exclamation to sundry ejaculations of pleasure that brought a series of ecstatic howls from his admirers.

"I tell you, gen'lemen, this hyer is jest hunk!" Leatherlungs cried, in answer to their howlings. "I've been dreamin' o' this hyer lay-out ever sence I left Persimmon Holler. I tole M'lindy, jest afore I started—M'lindy's my s'ster, you know—that I war a-goin' to be a cowboy er bu'st!"

"Thought M'lindy wus yer sweetheart!" one of the bystanders snorted.

"Land o' love—no! She's the one that snuggled up to that red-headed butcher—blast 'im! That's why I'm a-roamin'." That's what made Persimmon Holler too small to hold me."

"Come, now!" protested Broncho, who was standing in the doorway of the Bower. "Ain't you pilin' it on jest a leetle too thick, stranger? I heerd that song o' Joe Bowers an' Saly, more'n twenty years ago."

"Well, I reckon you don't take me for no spring chicken!" Leatherlungs cried, with disgust. "I'm a reg'lar Meethuserlum, an' the giniwine, 'rig'nal Joe Bowers, of Pike. You hear me!"

Broncho turned away to hide a snicker; and the cavalcade of cowboys which had been forming, and to which Leatherlungs now attached himself, dashed out of the town at a swinging gallop.

Leatherlungs was wild with curiosity and the excitement of the new life upon which he was entering. He seemed to regard everything—the wide reaches of buffalo grass plains, the shimmering mirage, the vastness of the treeless expanse—through the magnifying spectacles of childhood.

His constant exclamations of wonder brought peals of laughter and an endless succession of banter from the cowboys forming the company.

Such a roaring farce as this herculean tenderfoot would keep going was worth much to witness.

Although, as has been said, the round-up was over, there was yet much work to be done on the ranches, and they were on their way to assist in "cutting out" the marketable cattle and branding the increase of Bedrock's herds.

Leatherlungs was not long in discovering that, however jovial they might be, Bedrock's cowboys were a set of scoundrels who would hesitate at no villainy, from robbing a stage to murder.

While they had great respect for Leatherlungs's muscular powers and the marvelous skill at riding which he had displayed, they regarded him as an extremely simple-minded rustic, who had conceived a sudden ambition to become a cowboy, and who was too verdant to be dangerous, or make necessary any concealment.

By hard riding they reached the great Phi Ranch, on the Pawnee, late in the afternoon.

This ranch was the especial pride of the late Buck Hazelton, and bore many mementoes of that gentleman's eccentricity.

The buildings were of a better order than those usually found on cattle-ranches, and there was even some attempt at architectural display in the construction of the ranch house. It was also comfortably furnished and contained a well-selected library.

The name of this ranch and of the brand, consisting simply of the Greek letter phi, known everywhere as the Buck Hazelton brand, a tested somewhat to Hazelton's classical tastes and education.

Leatherlungs speedily made himself master of all these facts and filed them carefully away in the note-book of his memory.

He also discovered that the men now in Bedrock's employ were all new men. Not a cowboy who had ever worked for Hazelton could be found on the place.

"He was a queer chap, was Hazelton," observed one of the cowboys, to whom Leatherlungs had cautiously broached the subject. "None o' the boys knows much 'bout him. I've been told he come West along in the 'sixties. Some trouble er 'nuther was at the back of it. His wife died er left 'im er somethin'; I don't zackly know what it was."

"Someway he seemed to hate to look at the country back there. He made sev'ral trips after he fu'st come out, I'm told. But they allus made him as blue as indigo fer a month er more, an' finally he quit goin' nighabout altogether."

"Then he settled down to makin' money; an' Buck Hazelton didn't have no equal in that line when he

put his whole mind into it. He could just coin money."

"I reckon he was about the richest cattleman in this bull country. He had ranges an' herds all along the Arkansas, an' almost more'n you'd care to count in No Man's Land, in the Panhandle, in New Mexico and everywhar else nearly. I tell you he was rich—jest slashin' rich!"

From others Leatherlungs learned the names and locations of these ranches, and by nightfall he had accumulated quite a varied stock of information concerning Hazelton and his possessions.

"This hyer Bedrock's about the luckiest feller alive," was Leatherlungs's comment. "Jest think o' steppin' into an' fa'ry wailerin' in wealth like that jest because you happen to marry the darter o' the man that owned it all."

The cowboy looked at him quizzically. "Some call it luck, some call it—I well I wont use any hard names. Bedrock's the best paymaster in the country, and he k'n afford to be."

The work of cutting out and branding commenced in earnest the following morning. The branding-pen was simply a cattle-chute, shaped like a capital Y. The cattle to be branded were driven in between the wings. By their crowding they forced themselves, one at a time, through the narrow lane, which we may call the stem of the letter.

Cowboys, with red hot branding-irons, were stationed along the walls of this narrow lane, whose duty it was to press those burning irons against the hips of the cattle as they passed them.

It was not a pleasant business, but Leatherlungs, who was determined to make himself useful, pocketed his feelings, and plunged into the work with a will.

When the cutting-out and branding are finished the cattle not sold are turned again on the ranges; and the cowboys, with a few exceptions, are out of employment until the next round-up.

Shortly after noon, Broncho rode furiously up to the herd and requested a few minutes' interview with the foreman. Horse and rider showed evidence of hard riding.

The foreman led the way into the ranch building and, when they were safe from observation, Broncho handed him a letter from Bedrock, dismissing Leatherlungs from his employ.

"What does that mean?" asked the surprised foreman. "The man only got hyer yisterday and I understood the boss was under contract to let the feller work fer him."

"That letter's on'y to be given to him, ef we, that is you an' me, think he'd ought to be bounced. Bedrock's spicions that the feller ain't so green as he looks. That, in fact, he's altogether too cute to be 'lowed to run around hyer loose."

The foreman eyed him curiously. Evidently he failed to comprehend the drift of the other's remarks.

"Well, there ain't no use of us fightin' shy of each other. Might's well speak plain, long as there ain't any other ears to hear!" Broncho exclaimed.

"We know at least, that the boss's title to this hyer property is ruther shaky. This darter business is one o' Bedrock's slick games. He played it fer all it was worth, and won; but he's been a leetle afraid lately that he mou't lose the stakes arter all."

"Now, he's got the notion into his head that this hyer Leatherlungs is the worst kind o' a fraud. That he's a spy in the pay o' certain parties that's tryin' to take Hazelton's property away from him."

"So he bounced me on a hoss afore day this morning, shoved that letter in my hand and told me to git."

"His instructions air that we're to find whether the feller's square er not; and ef he ain't, to hand 'im that letter an' bounce him."

"How air we a-g'in' to find that out?" queried the foreman, with a puzzled air.

"Pump him, I reckon. If he's a lyin', I believe I kin trip 'im up."

Broncho had great faith in his skill as a physiognomist, and believed that if Leatherlungs spoke falsely he could detect evidences of it in his features.

"I believe I kin tell a cheat as fur as I kin see him—when I'm on my guard."

He added the qualifying clause as he remembered how readily he had swallowed Leatherlungs's story, only three days before.

The foreman went out and directed one of the men to send Leatherlungs to the house.

"Might as well git ready fer him, in case he cuts up rusty!" said Broncho, as the foreman returned, slipping a cocked revolver into the breast of his closely-buttoned coat. The foreman imitated his example, and together they sat, awaiting the appearance of the man they were about to accuse.

Leatherlungs obeyed the summons and promptly presented himself before them, a look of curiosity showing plainly in his face.

"The chap out yender said as as how you gen'lemen wanted ter speak to me!" he said, doffing his pointed hat, as he came into their presence.

Broncho waved him to a chair, and Leatherlungs took a seat, holding the hat between his hands.

"Now, we want to know where you're frum! No monkey bizness, but the straight goods!" Broncho demanded in a savage tone.

Leatherlungs looked from one to the other in a bewildered way, as if not knowing what to make of this sudden assault.

"You don't mean ter tell me that you've fergot that a'ready!" he exclaimed, with owlish gravity. At the same time he shifted the hat uneasily, as if he feared the result of the interview.

"That yarn about Persimmon Holler won't go down, I tell ye, an' the sooner you drop it, the better!" Broncho growled.

"What's yer name, anyhow?"

"There ye go ag'in!" cried Leatherlungs in disgust. "The hind part o' my name's Leatherlungs. I tote the other two-thirds around in 'honor o' the the immortal—"

Broncho gave an angry snort and waved his hand for silence.

"Now, see hyer, this nonsense has gone fur enough. Your name's not George Washington Leatherlungs enny more'n mine is; an' this stuff about Persimmon Holler jest makes me sick. We've got you foul, an' you might jest as well own up at wunst, an' save us the trouble o' forcin' you to."

After this outburst, Leatherlungs sat looking from one to the other in a dogged manner, but without replying.

"Come, out with it! What's yer real handle?" Broncho commanded, interpreting the dogged look as an indication of submission.

"Whar's the use?" Leatherlungs cried, clapping the hat on his head and rising, as if about to depart. "You wouldn't believe me. You're jest a-tryin' to pick a fuss with me, 'cause I don't know ev'rything thar is to know about this blasted country. I allus heerd that was the way cowboys treated fellers that war a little green, but I didn't more'n half-believe it."

"Set down!" thundered Broncho. "You don't leave this house till you answer our questions. Now, what's yer name!"

"Leatherlungs! Leatherlungs! George Washington Leatherlungs!"

His voice rose with each repetition, and he fairly howled the last.

"There, mebbe you kin remember that! Ef you can't, I'd advise you to paste it inter yer pocketbook, so's you kin look at it ev'ry time you go fer to take a drink, which I calc'late's mighty often."

His manner angered Broncho almost beyond endurance. He had a wholesome respect for Leatherlungs's great strength, however, and did not care to provoke a conflict unless he could "get the drop on him," to use a Western expression.

"That's what you said afore!" said Broncho, "but it ain't so!"

An angry light leaped into Leatherlungs's eyes.

"You want to go a little slow on that!" he growled, ominously. "I ain't used to bein' called a liar an' it jist naturally r'ills me."

Broncho's right hand crept slowly toward the revolver concealed in his coat. The movement did not escape the eagle glance of Leatherlungs.

"What do you mean, then, by sneakin' around hyer, the way you're a-doin'?" Broncho asked, changing the line of his attack.

Leatherlungs's eyes opened in surprise.

"Sneakin'? Whose a-sneakin'?"

"You air; an' you're gettin' big pay fer it, too! Come, now! Who's hired you to tackle this job?"

The puzzled look on Leatherlungs's face deepened. He twisted his hands into the soiled handkerchief about his neck and stared at the pair, as if he could scarcely believe the evidence of his ears.

"I don't ketch you!" he gasped. "Can't git it through my head, nohow, what you mean?"

"I mean that you're a lyin', sneak'n' spy!"

Broncho grasped the butt of the concealed revolver, as he lissed the words through his clinched teeth.

Leatherlungs's hands left his throat and his arms straightened out with the quickness almost of a lightning flash. Each hand grasped a derringer; and, before Broncho and the astonished foreman could get out their weapons, they found themselves looking squarely into those deadly tubes.

CHAPTER X.

BEDROCK SHOOTS A GHOST.

To return to Jason Bedrock, whom we left quaking at the sudden appearance of a face he believed to be buried beneath the shifting sands of the Arkansas.

After being lifted to the platform he shrunk into his chair, as if anxious to escape observation. A ghastly pallor overspread his usually florid face and his limbs shook with the palsy of fear.

Luckily the performances in the arena were ended, and the shouting and turmoil that usually attends the breaking up of such an assembly served to partially conceal the extremity of his terror.

Very few in the immense crowd understood the cause of his sudden fright or comprehended the meaning of his frantic cries. His prostration and alarming demeanor were very generally credited to sudden illness and violent pain.

Those nearest him knew better, but were fully as ignorant of the real cause of his singular actions and fear-stricken appearance.

The fainting of Mrs. Bedrock had attracted very little attention. It was, in fact, unknown, except to those who sat beside her. These accounted for it on the ground of the sudden illness of her husband.

That lady was quite herself now, and chatted as gayly as if no terrors haunted her guilty soul.

A very bad headache the previous day had left her with shaken nerves, she said, and the fear that her beloved husband was seriously ill had been too much for her.

She came over to the stand where Bedrock still sat, looking like the ghost of his former self.

"Are you feeling quite well again, dear?" she asked, in a voice intended to be heard by all about them. "I was afraid you would have another one of those nervous attacks, if you attempted to conduct such an exciting affair as a bull fight. You remember I tried to persuade you to decline the place this morning."

Bedrock caught at the idea, and endeavored to summon a faint smile.

"I know you did," he replied, with an attempt at cheerfulness. "But I thought the plaguery things had left me. I'm feelin' better now. I think I'll be all right in a little bit. Ef you'll have a buggy sent down I'll ride up home. I feel a little too shaky in the legs to walk, an' my head whirls so I'm afraid to try a pony."

In a very little while a buggy was in readiness. Bedrock climbed painfully into it, followed by Mrs. Bedrock, and they whirled away toward the bower.

Bedrock went directly to his room and remained there until after dark.

Then he sent for Broncho, and the men whom he had paid for tumbling Tobe Arnold's supposed corpse into the muddy waters of the Arkansas.

Mrs. Bedrock remained with him to receive them. She was a woman not at all given to flightiness or hallucinations, and she had a supreme contempt for ghosts.

Under the influence of her rather strong mind, Bedrock had come to the conclusion that it was not a spirit he had seen, but the living face of Tobe Arnold, the cowboy.

How he managed to escape he now proposed to discover.

Broncho was the first to arrive, and a few minutes later came the Irishman. He excused his comrade on the ground that he was absent from town.

Bedrock went right to the point, and explained why he had sent for them.

"An' now I don't want any lyin', you understand!" he said fiercely, in conclusion. "What's the reason you didn't chuck that feller into the river as I told ye to?"

The Irishman lifted his eyes to the ceiling in pious horror at having been accused of making a false report of his doings.

"Chuck 'im intil it, is it? An' didn't we's chuck 'im intil it? An' the felly wor deader nor the bulls they do be stabbin' the day!"

"You're sure o' that?" demanded Bedrock, the old terror coming back into his face.

"Am I shure, that I'm me own mither's son? Sorra a lie is it, I'm tellin' ye, at all, at all! The felly wor so deader that he felt loike a chunk o' rock when we wor carryin' him."

Mrs. Bedrock, who had been eying the Irishman closely, now put in an oar:

"Didn't the man come to, now, and pay you to tell that yarn and then stick to it? We know he isn't dead for we saw him to-day. The truth is bound to come out, Jerry, so you might as well tell all about it."

The startled look that came into the Irishman's eyes convinced her that she had not struck far from the mark.

But he stuck to his first version and neither threats nor persuasions could wring a confession from his lips.

"It's a mighty queer lay-out!" Broncho observed, with a wise nod of the head, when the Irishman had departed. "About the queerest I ever rua onto."

Bedrock sighed and looked troubled. He could not quite dispel from his mind the unpleasant conviction that he had seen a spirit and the interview with the Irishman had served to fix the idea more firmly. At the same time he felt rather ashamed to acknowledge the belief.

He could not forget that he had seen Tobe to all appearances dead and with his clothing dyed with the blood that had flowed from the death-wound.

The silence was broken by Mrs. Bedrock: "Jerry is lying! I could see it in his face. He knows more about this affair than he dares to tell."

"But I seen the feller myself and he was deader than the carkiss of a steer!" Bedrock objected. "How air you a-goin' to git over that?"

"By simply denyin' it. No doubt you thought he was dead, but he wasn't. It may be that I'm doing Jerry an injustice. They may have carried the man down to the river and pitched him in."

"But even that does not prove that the man was dead. The water may have revived him and he may have made his escape. I have heard of such things."

"One point is settled. The man is not dead. This stuff about ghosts and spirits is absolutely silly."

"It makes me ashamed of you, Bedrock, that you should indulge in such fancies. When a man dies, he dies; and that ends the play, as far as he is concerned. He never comes back, you may rest assured of that!"

"Now, the question is, what's the fellow up to? Is he playing some game or did he appear in the crowd simply as a spectator?"

"If he's alive, he's certainly up to some job!" Broncho observed, with another wise nod of his head.

"Alive! Didn't I tell you that point was settled? Of course he's alive!"

"Where did he go, then, so sudden?" Bedrock demanded. "That's what I'd like to know!"

"Bedrock, you're actually becoming feeble-minded!" his wife exclaimed scornfully. "He's slipped back into the crowd, to be sure, no very difficult thing to do when you remember the amount of confusion that took place!"

"Well, what do you make out of it, then?" he demanded, doggedly. It nettled him to be spoken to in that manner.

"Simply this: Arnold's playing some deep game. What it is, I don't just know. But of one thing I'm sure. He's in the employ of the Dandy of Dodge."

Bedrock started as if stung by a serpent.

"Then, they're after the property!"

"Of course they are, you ninny! And they'll get it too, if you don't show that you're possessed of a little more sense!"

Bedrock was filled with rage.

"Ef I'd 'a' thought o' that I'd 'a' downed the skunk as soon as I laid eyes on him!" he cried.

"You may have another opportunity!" she exclaimed, eagerly. "It would hardly have done under the circumstances. The chances are that you would have hit somebody else."

"The question now is, will you have the nerve to do it, when that time comes?"

"I don't care about tacklin' ghosts!" Bedrock admitted. "But I ain't afraid o' nary live man that walks."

"That's the trouble exactly!" his wife continued. "But you must fire at him, ghost or no ghost! A bullet in the right place will be apt to tell the story. Probably he reckons for protection on the fact that you regard him as dead."

"Well, ef he shows his ugly mug ag'in I'll try him a whirl!" Bedrock declared. "Tobe's a long-headed chap an' if he's in with Dandy they're apt to make an ugly team. I'd like to know what's become o' the gal, though!"

"That's the talk! plug him!" Broncho snarled, showing his teeth. At the same time the cold chills were creeping up his spine and he would have run like a whipped puppy, if any one had announced that the ghost was coming.

"We may consider that settled then!" Mrs. Bedrock declared, well pleased at the result of her argument. "Now, there's one other point I wish to talk about."

"This man Leatherlungs! I have a presentiment that his presence means mischief to us. I am sorry that you employed him."

Bedrock was astonished. "Why, what harm kin there be in a tenderfoot like him?"

"Is he a tenderfoot?" Mrs. Bedrock asked; "or is his innocence a mask put on for the occasion? After you saw that face it occurred to me that there might be some connection between the two."

"Why, the feller jest come into town yisterday!" said Broncho.

"I have heard that. There may be nothing in this notion of mine, but the idea makes me uneasy. Can't you refuse to employ him?"

Bedrock spent a moment in thoughtful silence.

"I think you're overly frightened," he replied. "I can't git out o' hirin' him, as I kin see; but there's nothin' in the contrac' to keep me from dischargin' him. He filled his part o' the programme to the letter an' if I don't let him go out to the ranch he'll raise a rumpus, likely, an' I'll have to make some awkward explanations."

"Promise me, then, that you'll send Broncho out with an order for his discharge, the very next day after he reaches the ranch."

The promise was given, but the order was subsequently modified, as we have seen, giving Broncho discretionary powers in the premises. This change was brought about by subsequent reflection on the part of Bedrock which led him to doubt his wife's judgement—at least, in this particular.

Until long after midnight they sat thus talking and planning. The last lounge departed from the bower, the fare-dealers ascended to their rooms and the lights were turned low by the sleepy bar-keeper, whose duty it was to remain up all night.

Bedrock was nervous and restless and could not sleep. Whenever he closed his eyes the white, drawn face he had seen at the bull-fight rose before his mental vision and completely banished all thoughts of slumber.

After a time he dressed and descended to the gaming-room, thinking to while away an hour or two talking to the barkeeper.

That individual roused up and rubbed his heavy eyes as Bedrock entered.

"An extra fine time we had this afternoon," he observed, as his employer came in, his mind turning naturally to the events of the day.

"It was certainly ahead o' anythin' we ever had here afore," Bedrock replied, not exactly liking the subject, but glad to have some one to talk to.

"Yes, so I think! The riding of that greeny from Missouri went ahead of anything I ever saw. I talked with him afterward, and he told me that he had practiced riding cattle bareback ever since he was a boy."

"Did he tell you that?" asked Bedrock, with sudden interest.

The information served to modify the doubts he had begun to entertain with regard to the tenderfoot.

"Yes; an' the fellow's as strong as an ox. The way he threw that bull was no longer a subject of wonder to me when I saw him perform other feats of strength. He lifted a stone in here this afternoon that a common horse could hardly drag. The fellow's a giant in strength."

Bedrock's opinion underwent further modifications; and a half-hour's talk with the barkeeper drove almost every vestige of doubt from his mind.

Suddenly, as they were thus talking, a slight rustle was heard in the direction of the rear entrance.

Bedrock turned his head. Tobe Arnold, with features unnaturally white and drawn, stood in the very center of the room, clad, apparently, in the blood-stained garment he had worn when Bedrock last saw him.

Bedrock's eyes seemed about to start from their sockets, as they fell on this ghastly figure.

He reeled against the bar and clutched wildly at his throat, as if suffocating.

The barkeeper did not know the man who stood so silently in the center of the room, but he was alarmed at the unexpected agitation displayed by his employer.

After an instant Bedrock partially regained control of his quivering nerves, and drawing his revol-

ver, fired the contents of every chamber full at Tobe's broad breast.

His terror knew no bounds, when the smoke drifted away, revealing the form of the cowboy still standing there.

Then the ghostly figure raised its hand and pointing a finger full at Bedrock, cried, in a deep, hollow voice:

"When will the murderer of Buck Hazelton give up his millions?"

Bedrock reeled and the barkeeper sprang forward to keep him from falling to the floor.

When that individual looked around again, the mysterious figure had disappeared.

CHAPTER XI.

THE DOCTOR'S PROTEGEE.

A FEW days before Tobe Arnold made his ghostly appearances, Doctor Philip Elliott, the pseudo-cattleman, took lodgings at the Bower.

The second-story of the Bower was run as a boarding-house, with the exception of a suite of rooms reserved for the exclusive use of Mr. and Mrs. Bedrock.

Bedrock believed in turning his pennies as often as possible and the profits of a boarding-house, in a border town, are usually considerable.

The doctor took extra pains to rix himself out as a typical cattleman; this, with a well-filled pocket-book and a beguiling story of his herds and ranges, secured him instant favor with Bedrock and place at his command the best that the house afforded.

"I have a distant relative, whom I am expecting at any time, and I wish to make some special arrangements for her accommodation. She is a sort of *protegee* of mine, in fact; was left to my care at her father's death and I have endeavored to look after her welfare ever since."

"She is inclined to be a little troublesome lately. Has been cultivating too much of a feeling of independence to suit me altogether, and insists that she shall be allowed to make her own way."

"I have reasoned with her, but to no purpose. She detests a butterfly existence, and is never so happy as when at work. I am abundantly able to support her, but she will not permit it. So I let her have her own way, only stipulating that she shall call on me when she needs money."

"A queer girl, I should say," Bedrock commented.

"So I thought at first. But when you come to look at it, I don't know but she's about right. Anyway, I admire her pluck, and aid her without letting her know it."

"And that brings me to the point. As she is a total stranger here it will be difficult for her to find employment. Could you not take her into your service? She is a splendid domestic; in fact, can do any kind of work you may want done, and do it neatly and intelligently."

Bedrock was anxious to please this cattleman, but there was no servant he cared to discharge to give place to this untried stranger, and he could not think of adding to his expenses.

"Don't see how I kin do it," he exclaimed, regretfully. "Got all the help I want, and my expenses air at the top notch now."

"You didn't wait to hear me through," Elliott protested. "Her services will not cost you a cent. If I really allowed her to depend on herself she would sometimes have a hard row. I let her believe she is earning her own living. That humors her sense of independence."

"At the same time, the wages she gets come out of my pocket. I prefer to pay them. By doing so she is granted liberties other servants never dream of. her pay—coming as it does, out of my own pocket—is larger for the amount of work she does, and it is no difficult matter to secure her a situation."

"Even you, Mr. Bedrock, are not the man I take you to be, if you refuse to avail yourself of the labor of a servant that costs you nothing."

Bedrock smiled grimly. "Ain't many men that would, if they needed a servant badly."

"Certainly not; and, if I choose to support this *protegee* in that way, that is my own affair. The better pay she gets enables her to dress more comfortably, and, in every respect, present a better appearance than the average servant. She takes these things as we take 'the gifts that the gods send us,' feeling herself entitled to them, and is happy in the belief that she is making her own way in the world."

A crafty look appeared on Bedrock's evil face. "I reckon a man don't want to do all that fer a woman unless she's a little nearer to him than the darter of an old friend."

"What do you mean by that?" Elliott demanded, an angry flush mounting to his cheeks.

"Why, that p'raps she was a little more to you than she ought to be!"

"See here, Bedrock!" Elliott exclaimed hotly. "I don't want to quarrel with you. We're bo'h cattlemen, and we ought to be friends. But I don't want to hear you utter another insinuation against the character of that young lady."

"I won't stand it, for it does her vile injustice. She is as pure as an angel, and the man that attempts to sully her good name will very soon find himself with a row on his hands."

"No offense! No offense!" Bedrock cried, cowering slightly under the glance of those fierce eyes.

"That was jest one o' my little jokes. Circumstances are rather queer, an' I thought it a good chance to nag you a little."

The scowl faded from Elliott's face, at this apology. Besides, he realized that he could not afford to quarrel with the man before him.

"Of course the young lady's welcome; an' I'll be

glad to have her stay as long as you want to continue the arrangement."

That afternoon Elliott presented his *protégé* to Mr. and Mrs. Bedrock.

She was an extremely handsome young lady, lively and vivacious, and with dark hair and brunette complexion.

She seemed especially pleased to obtain the position, and entered upon her work with such alacrity and cheerfulness, that Mrs. Bedrock was quite charmed with her, and Bedrock promptly voted her a trump.

"I only wish we could get all our help that cheap!" was his mental comment, as he saw her whisking briskly about the rooms.

Every evening the cattleman called for Miss Susie Sutton—that was the name given—and together they drove about the town.

The second time this occurred, Bedrock proceeded to rally the doctor about it.

"I see through yer little game now!" he said, laughingly. "An' I must say that it's rather cute. 'Tain't every feller that kin love his sweetheart so close to his side as that!"

The doctor actually blushed, rough cattleman as he represented himself to be. But he seemed pleased, nevertheless, and took no pains to disabuse Bedrock's mind of its error, if an error existed.

"Hittin' the bull's-eye purty close, ain't it?" Bedrock continued, chucking the doctor in the ribs and laughing boarsely.

"Well, I won't deny that I think a good deal of the young lady!" Elliott admitted. "But I don't care to have it generally known. Come into the bar and let me bribe you into silence with a good drink."

Bedrock smilingly complied—his nerves were not yet shaken by those mysterious appearances—and, as he lifted the glass to his lips, he proposed the toast:

"Success to you and yer sweetheart, an' confusion to yer enemies!"

"Amen!" cried Elliott, with a force that was rather startling.

The next night the pseudo cattleman was closeted with Dandy in the latter's "den," a couple of blocks from the Bower.

"The trick is working like a charm!" Elliott said, in reply to Dandy's question; and a smile came to his lips, as he thought how completely he had pulled the wool over Bedrock's visual organs.

"And the young lady, Miss—Miss—"

"Sutton!" Elliott prompted.

"Ab, yes! I had almost forgotten the name. And Miss Sutton—how does she bear herself?"

"Right royally!" Elliott replied, with a light laugh. "As a chambermaid she is simply perfection. Mrs. B. was loud in her praises this morning."

"As for Bedrock, he thinks I am in love with her, and is disposed to be rather jolly over his imaginary discovery."

Dandy looked at Elliott sharply.

"And you permitted him to think so?"

"Why, of course! Susie is a very lovable young lady, and a better man than I am might be pardoned for falling in love with her. And then, that gives such a plausible explanation to the interest I am taking in her welfare."

Dandy stared into the lamplight, but made no reply.

Much more was said that need not be detailed here, and the hour was late when the doctor arose to take his departure.

His attentions to Miss Susie Sutton were very perceptibly increased from that time forward. Their drives together became more frequent and Elliott fell into the habit of calling upon her evenings.

The young lady seemed in no wise averse to the favors thus bestowed on her. The frequent drives and calls relieved her of many onerous duties.

After a few days it became tacitly understood by Mr. and Mrs. Bedrock that Susie was to be relieved of work at nightfall. It seemed to be the wish of Elliott, and the will of that cattle magnate was law unto them.

"We can't afford to offend a man that is so lavish with his money!" Mrs. Bedrock had observed.

"Susie works well through the day and her services cost us nothing. We can readily excuse her of evenings, under the circumstances. There will be a wedding come of it all, you may depend on that."

"It seems to me that Susie is a little imprudent, though. For the past two nights she has been absent from the house until after eleven o'clock. Not that I care; but this is a rough town and people are apt to talk."

"They will wink at much greater offenses, but are ready to snap up anything that may be twisted into a bit of gossip, when the subject is a pretty young lady."

And what did Susie Sutton think of all this?

Standing before her mirror as she loosened her dark hair and allowed it to flow in silken billows down her back, she frowned slightly at the handsome face that looked out of the glass, then laughed lightly and exclaimed:

"Everybody is talking about the attentions the doctor has been paying me lately, and no doubt they think he's desperately in love with Susie Sutton. Mrs. Bedrock said as much to-day."

Then a roguish, coquettish smile played about her red lips.

"Oh, dear! If he should really and truly fall in love with me, what would I say to him?"

CHAPTER XII.

A MYSTERIOUS WARNING.

JASON BEDROCK was a crack shot with a revolver. Nervous as he was, he felt that he could not possibly miss the broad breast of Tobe Arnold at a distance

of less than ten paces, if the form of the cowboy was really a form of flesh.

Therefore, when the smoke drifted away, revealing the cowboy apparently unharmed, Bedrock's terror knew no bounds. The horrible sensation of murder, following so swiftly, left him completely unmanned.

If the barkeeper had not held him, he would have run shrieking into the almost deserted streets.

"Where is it—where is it?" he cried, cowering abjectly and staring convulsively about the room.

"What? The fellow you shot at? He leaped through the window, I suppose," the barkeeper replied, wonderingly. "I don't see how you happened to miss him."

Bedrock recovered himself with a shudder. His caution began to come back with the return of his reason. Frightened as he was, he yet realized that it would be unwise to reveal the cause of his fear to the barkeeper.

"The feller startled me so that I couldn't 'a' hit the side of a door!" he explained, rising and leaning unsteadily against the bar.

The barkeeper could easily believe the statement, for Bedrock's usually florid face was as white as a sheet, and his hands shook so that the finger-nails rattled upon the bar.

"Give me a glass o' liquor, an' then I'll tell you about it."

The barkeeper filled a large glass, and Bedrock gulped it down. The fiery stimulant served to quiet his shaking nerves, and the color came slowly back into his face.

"You see, the chap used to work for me!" he explained. "His boss stepped into a dog hole and pitched him out o' the saddle. He landed on his head, an' has never been right sence. Of course I had to discharge him when he got well enough to travel, an' he's laid it up a' in me."

"He's tried to kill me two or three times; and some way he's got the notion into his crazy head that I've murdered somebody an' that it's his duty to lay me out fer it."

"It's a different man he accuses me o' makin' away with, every time he bobs up. Last time it was old Sol Smith that used to run a ranch down on the Beaver. No tellin' who it will be next."

Bedrock attempted a ghastly smile.

He hoped the story would satisfy the barkeeper. It was the best he could think of then and his mind was in too great a whirl to attempt a more elaborate fabrication.

For several minutes there had been excited movements overhead and now Mrs. Bedrock appeared at the top of the stairway and asked what was the matter.

"Nothin' much, my dear!" Bedrock called out, in answer. "I'm comin' up in a minute an' then I'll tell you all about it."

He did tell her all about it, shortly afterward, and was so firmly convinced that he had really seen a spirit, that Mrs. Bedrock became quite disgusted.

However, her hard, common sense and persistence finally obtained a partial victory; but the result of the victory was almost equivalent to a defeat.

To be alive, and the desperate ally of Madge Hazelton and The Dandy of Dodge, was almost as terrible to contemplate as the cowboy's disembodied spirit, and boded far more of evil.

But Bedrock's dread began to fade again, as the days slipped by without further startling manifestations.

Broncho returned from his trip to the Phi Ranch and reported that he was satisfied Leatherlungs was all he represented himself to be, and that, consequently, he had not delivered the letter of discharge. He claimed that, with the assistance of the foreman, he had submitted the Missourian to such a rigid examination that if the latter had been a spy the truth must inevitably have come out.

Bedrock was especially pleased with this report and paid Broncho handsomely for his care and fidelity. The statement accorded with his own belief regarding the Missourian's innocence. It rather tickled him to be able to refute successfully one of Mrs. Bedrock's many pre-entiments, for that lady had a very disagreeable way of asserting her infallibility in matters of that kind.

The night that Broncho returned, the Bower was in full blast and crowded with anxious gamblers.

Dandy had been seldom seen there of late, but on this night he occupied his old place at the faro table and played with all of his old-time skill.

Bedrock frowned, as he noted Dandy's presence. He had conceived an intense hatred of the dashing sport and would have paid handsomely to secure his assassination.

Dandy, on the other hand, seemed wholly unaware of Bedrock's presence and "coppered" his bets with the smiling calmness which so well became him.

The pseudo ranchman sat at the other faro-table, and won and lost with a reckless disregard that served to raise him greatly in Bedrock's esteem.

Broncho came in while the playing was at its highest, but instantly departed when his eyes fell on the smiling face of Dandy. He had a wholesome fear of the sport, obtained in the harsh school of experience, and had no desire to be again hurled headlong into the street.

Broncho's fear of The Dandy of Dodge was largely shared by the "tough" characters of the town. There were plenty of men within reach who would not hesitate to knife an ordinary man, but few who cared to quarrel with Dandy, knowing the record he had behind him. So it was no fault of Bedrock's that Dandy had not been slain. He had found it impossible to bribe any one to make the attempt.

The hours flew by, midnight came and went, and still the excited players kept their places and the loungers filed in and out of the Bower.

Bedrock had quite recovered his equanimity and was at his old place behind the bar, mopping up, with damp cloth, the drippings from the glasses.

The anticipation of coming evil, however, never wholly left his mind. It haunted him by night and by day. Yet he had come to regard it very much as the residents of earthquake districts regard the threatening rumblings of the slumbering volcano.

The explosion might come at any time and it might be delayed indefinitely. And, then, something might occur to render the efforts of his enemies harmless. The uncertainty brought a feeling of security, which Bedrock did not care to banish by borrowing unnecessary trouble.

In the intervals between his moppings he talked to the barkeeper. That individual had never quite believed Bedrock's explanations of the cause of his alarming fright, but subsequent events had almost driven the subject from his mind. The Bower was an extremely lively place and it must be a very remarkable occurrence indeed that remained long in the memory of the "right" man.

"The gamin' tables have jest coined money ever sence the bull-fight!" Bedrock observed, with a satisfied smile. "I don't believe I ever knowed the boys to throw their mon-y around quite so reckless!"

"Yes; we're having a paying run!" the barkeeper answered. "The round-up was a big thing and lasted a little longer than common. The boys made a lot of money and they'll never rest satisfied till they blow it all in. I see Dandy is on deck to-night. I've been wondering why he didn't take a hand while the cash is so plenty."

Bedrock frowned; but the barkeeper did not notice it, and continued:

"It's an old saying, that 'where the carcass is there will the eagles be gathered together,' and if Dandy can't pick a man to his bones there isn't anybody that can."

Bedrock disliked this scriptural application, and the frown deepened.

The barkeeper was about to continue his discriminating remarks, when Bedrock turned deathly pale, and reeled against the bar for support.

His starting eyes were turned toward the rear entrance, and as he swayed to and fro he gave utterance to a cry of horror.

There was an instant cessation of the playing, and all eyes were fixed on Bedrock.

Following the direction of his terror-stricken gaze they beheld the blood-stained clothing and corpse-like features of Tobe Arnold.

While they were staring curiously at this ghastly face and figure—unknown to nearly all of them—the room was suddenly plunged in darkness; and out from the wall in fiery letters came the mysterious accusation and warning:

"Woe! woe! to Jason Bedrock, the murderer of Buck Hazelton!"

CHAPTER XIII.

BEDROCK SCORES A POINT.

It was a startled and anxious group that gathered in Bedrock's apartment above the Bower in the early morning.

When those luminous letters came out on the wall, Bedrock gave a terrified scream and fell senseless behind the bar.

A scene of wild confusion instantly ensued. Panic-stricken, the throng made a senseless rush for the doors and windows. Smothered oaths mingled with the crashing of panes, and in five minutes the Bower was cleared, and the frantic mob of sports and gamblers rolled down the street, the recreant barkeeper leading the way at his best gait.

Then, had not the room been enveloped in darkness, a shadowy form might have been seen to mount the bench that stood against the wall beneath the fiery letters. As it passed quickly along the letters disappeared, and only the dead, blank wall remained.

At that instant the voice of Mrs. Bedrock was heard calling from the head of the stairs, and the shadow vaulted lightly through an open window.

Getting no response to her calls Mrs. Bedrock descended the stair and thrust her head into the Bower. The darkness frightened her; but she was a woman of pluck, and quickly striking a match, she applied it to one of the coal-oil lamps.

Even in her excitement she noticed that the light had been extinguished by turning it out, for the wick was far down in the burner.

A strange scene was revealed as the light flashed over the room. Tables and chairs were overturned, cards, gaming-checks and money lay scattered upon the floor; bottles and glasses were shattered into fragments, and even window-sashes had been broken and carried away; all attesting the mad rush made by the occupants of the room.

A hollow groan came from behind the bar. Mrs. Bedrock made her way thither and found Bedrock senseless and apparently in the agonies of death.

Rushing to the stairway, she screamed frantically to the servants for aid; and when they arrived, she had Bedrock carried carefully up to his room.

Friction of the limbs and skin, with liberal applications of water, and a glass of brandy as a stimulant, soon restored him to consciousness.

As he opened his eyes, he stared about the room with a shudder; then, recognizing the familiar surroundings and the anxious faces of the servants, he attempted a ghastly smile.

"Order 'em out!" he commanded, waving a hand toward the servants. Then, when the room had been cleared:

"Send fer Broncho! He may have been in the Bower a little while ago. Now, I've got something I want to say to you."

He drew her close to him, and in a horrified voice told her about the mysterious letters of fire, and of this third appearance of Tobe Arnold.

He had hardly concluded the narration, when Broncho rapped on the door and was admitted to the room.

In reply to Mrs. Bedrock's eager interrogatories, he said that he was not in the room at the time of those singular manifestations. He had heard the subject discussed by a group of startled cowboys, and had at once hurried toward the Bower, meeting the messenger on the way.

"And now, what do you think of it all?" Mrs. Bedrock asked anxiously.

The question was a poser, and Broncho's intellect was not equal to the task of solving it.

"The letters must have faded out!" Mrs. Bedrock commented. "They were not visible when I was in the Bower a few minutes ago. Of course it was all a trick. Rather a startling one, but a trick just the same. Luminous paint or some preparation of phosphorus will account for it. Probably the wall will exhibit some traces of the material, whatever it was. Do you think you have sufficient courage, Broncho, to assist me in making an examination?"

Broncho would have preferred being elsewhere just then, but he was ashamed to show the white feather before Mrs. Bedrock. Certainly he could go where a woman was not afraid to penetrate.

"Don't s'pose it'll be any use!" he said carelessly. "But I'll go along to satisfy you."

A servant was called to attend Bedrock during their absence, and they descended together into the Bower.

Bedrock had described the spot where the letters had made their appearance and Mrs. Bedrock climbed upon the bench and minutely examined the wall.

Nothing was visible, and she ran her hands slowly over the polished surface. She imagined that a trace of dampness remained, as if the letters had been wiped out with a wet sponge, and she communicated her belief to Broncho.

The practical way in which she went about the investigation served to drive the cobwebs of superstition from his brain; and when she announced this opinion he grasped at it eagerly.

"Ef that's so," he exclaimed, "then it goes to prove that this Tobe Arnold, that Bedrock says he saw layin' dead, is still alive and kickin' and means some kind of devilment."

"Of course!" she replied, with a tinge of scorn. "That's what I've been trying to beat into your stupid head all along. I get out of all patience with you and Bedrock. You both act just like you didn't have common sense. The idea of a dead man coming out of his grave for the purpose of playing pranks like this! It's ridiculous!"

As nothing further could be discovered, they ascended the stairs and again entered Bedrock's room.

"Well, did you find out anything?" he asked, in a tone that implied a belief that they had gone on a fool's errand.

"Yes; we did!" Mrs. Bedrock exclaimed, emphatically. "The letters are gone and the wall is damp."

Her husband looked at her questioningly.

"Don't understand the connection, eh? Well, the letters were probably written with some kind of phosphoric preparation. After they had served their purpose they were erased with a damp sponge."

The explanation was so simple that Bedrock was scarcely prepared to accept it.

"But how could they do it?" he gasped.

"Easy enough to rub them out after everybody had run away and left the room in darkness. When I first went into the Bower I could have scrubbed the walls all over without anybody being the wiser."

"By the way, wasn't the Bower closed, late last night?"

"Yes; every one went home, an' as there wasn't any custom I told the night man he might as well put up the shutters an' go too. I don't see, though, what that's got to do with it!"

"That shows how much sense you've got!" she snapped, scornfully.

"That gave whoever played this trick an opportunity to write the letters. They could get in with skeleton keys or something of that kind. The letters would only show when the room was darkened. It was day, you know, when the bark-eyer came back; and the lamps are always lighted of evenings before it gets dark. A better opportunity could not have been had."

Bedrock looked at his wife admiringly. He was pleased with her shrewdness; and, like Broncho, as the scales fell from his eyes, he began to believe again in Tobe Arnold's living reality.

"I heard the boys sayin' somethin' 'bout the letters callin' you a murderer!"

It was Broncho who broke the silence and he touched upon a subject that was then uppermost in the mind of each.

"Yes!" said Bedrock, his eyes rolling wildly from Broncho to Mrs. Bedrock and back again. "But that's a mistake. Buck Hazelton shot himself accidentally. They're tryin' to scare me into sayin' I done it. But I won't do it. I won't do it!"

"Do you suppose the charge will be believed by any one?" Mrs. Bedrock asked slowly.

Broncho twisted uneasily in his chair.

The woman eyed him fiercely.

"Come! If you have anything to say, say it; and don't squirm around like you was afraid to open

your mouth. If there's anything we have to meet, we want to know it."

"The boys was a-sayin' that they believed the old man was guilty!" Broncho admitted. "They said he showed it in his face. They didn't know what to make o' the strange-lookin' feller that give him such a start; but they rather 'lowed, mebbe, 'twas a chap that had seen the boss lay old Hazelton out."

"Is that all?" demanded Mrs. Bedrock, determined to know the worst.

"No; only I thought p'raps 'twouldn't be best to mention it. Come o' them used to work fer Hazelton; and they calculate to hunt up this strange chap and have a talk with him. Ef they find out that Bedrock hyer is guilty they said they'd hang him to a telegraph pole."

"Did they say that?" Bedrock yelled, leaping up as if he intended flight.

"That's jest what they said!" Broncho asserted. "I didn't want to mention it; but Mrs. Bedrock would have the story and I'm givin' it to you as straight as a string."

"This is serious!" said Mrs. Bedrock, anxiety showing plainly in her features. "I am satisfied that Dandy is really at the bottom of this entire affair; and I must give the fellow credit for playing his cards shrewdly."

"He is making headway and something must be done to stop him."

"I don't see how ye'r a-goin' to do it!" Broncho growled. He feared that he might be again called on to "tackle" the sport.

"Me nuther!" Bedrock sputtered. "I'd be willin' to pay handsome to have a knife stuck into his back; but where's the man to do it?"

"Why don't yer try it yerself, old boss?" Broncho snarled. He imagined that Bedrock was impugning his courage, and resented it.

"I wouldn't do, you know, no way you could fix it!" Bedrock objected. "Not that I'm afeard; but Dandy has friends that would make this hyer town too hot to hold me."

"Since you two gentlemen announce your inability to deal with the case, perhaps you will be willing to listen to my suggestions!" Mrs. Bedrock exclaimed with a sneer.

"You admit that something must be done. Why not invoke the aid of the law?"

The two looked at her questioningly.

"I don't exactly ketch on," said Bedrock.

"Have Dandy arrested and thrown into jail," she explained. "That will give us a breathing spell. Charge him with robbing the Bower during the darkness and confusion. Claim boldly that he is in collusion with Tobe Arnold; that he gained admission to the Bower during the absence of the barkeeper, and wrote those letters on the wall with phosphorus; and all because you would not submit to being blackmailed."

"The fact that he has not attempted to levy blackmail will make no difference. You can say he has; and, if I am not mistaken, Broncho here can swear to it, if necessary, without hurting his tender conscience."

Broncho grinned an assent, and the scheming and unscrupulous woman continued:

"It will make a very pretty and plausible story. You have lately come into great wealth through the death of Buck Hazelton, by your wife's inheritance. Dandy hunts up an alleged heiress and says that he will back her claim through thick and thin if you do not come down handsomely."

"Being an upright, honorable man, and strong in the righteousness of your cause, you indignantly spurn him and his demand. In fact, your virtuous anger is so aroused that you deliberately kick him into the street."

"In revenge he inaugurates a succession of flummery and fireworks; takes advantage of a concocted scare to rob the Bower; charges you, in an underhand and sneaking manner, with the murder of Buck Hazelton—who died from a bullet wound accidentally inflicted, as everybody knows; and endeavors to incite a mob of half-drunken cowboys to string you up to the nearest telegraph pole."

"What do you think of the story? Is it not a work of art?"

She smiled grimly, and the spirit of a dangerous woman lay revealed in her dark eyes.

"Reads just like a novel," said Broncho, admiringly; "but I dunno ef that story 'bout Dandy bein' kicked out o' the Bower will go down with the boys or not."

"Leave that out, then; it's immaterial."

Bedrock, who had given the narration his closest attention, drummed with his fingers, thoughtfully.

"The thing kin be worked," he said, looking up at last. "It's a bold move, but it will win. The mayor an' judge air both friends o' mine, and kin be counted on to help me out. If we go at the thing right we kin send Dandy to the penitentiary."

"I've packed juries and grand juries both afore to-day. Money talks, an' you may be cert'in I'll use plenty of it. In less than twenty-four hours I'll have Dandy behind the bars; in three days I'll have him indicted; and before a week is out he'll be on the way to the pen."

He tossed down a glass of liquor and arose to his feet, his face shining with his thoughts of triumph.

It was scarcely day; but he was eager to put the machinery of the law into operation, and hurried at once to the office of Mayor Cavanagh, his especial friend and champion.

A warrant was at once issued, and before noon Dandy was occupying a cell in the city prison—the mayor dictatorially refusing to release him on bail.

CHAPTER XIV.

BRONCHO BEN'S DISCOVERY.

ABOUT nine o'clock that evening, while Bedrock

was still congratulating himself on the successful carrying out of his wife's daring scheme, Broncho hurried breathlessly into the Bower.

Bedrock saw that he was the bearer of important news, and immediately led the way up-stairs.

"I've jest run onto somethin' what knocks the p'int off o' anythin' that's turned up yit!" Broncho declared, as he dropped into a chair.

"What's that?" asked Bedrock, anxiously.

"I'd been up the river a ways this afternoon, an' on comin' back, j-ust about dark, I seen a feller sneak down out o' the sand-hills, dip up a bucket of water an' scoot as ef he was afeard some one would see him."

"Thinks I to myself, that's a p'int worth investigatin'; for, you see, I couldn't imagine what he was doin' there. So I went to the ford and crossed, by wadin', an' sneaked back to the place where I'd seen him."

"The critter was gone, but I'd tuck good notice o' the way he went, an' follered on into the hills."

"I didn't know but I mout run into a nest o' road-agents, an' whenever I come to a patch o' moonlight I got down and wiggled through the bunch grass, Indian fashion."

"I hadn't got into the hills more'n a quarter, I reckon, when I noticed a dug-out, pokin' its nose up out o' the sand. There was a pesky sentinel a-walkin' around in front of it, and for awhile I laid powerful low."

"Purty soon I noticed more sentinels off in the hills, and it looked like I'd struck a gang o' road-agents, cert'in. I was 'most afeard to breathe, an' you had better believe I laid mighty low for a while."

"After a time the sentinel in front o' the den seemed to git kinder tired and sot down on a bench, in the shadder, to rest. T'other fellers didn't seem to be overly watchful, neither, an' I determined to try to crawl up an' peek through the winder."

"After about a half-hour's creepin' and wrigglin' I got round to the rear o' the shanty. There was a little winder in that end an' I could see a light through it. I crawled up to this winder!"

"Well, go on!" Bedrock growled. "How many of the rascals was in there?"

"'Twusn't road-agents!" cried Broncho, with a grin and a chuckle.

"What was it, then?" demanded Bedrock, impatiently.

Broncho leaned forward and replied, in a shrill whisper:

"'Twas Miss Madge Hazelton, an' this hyer Tobe Arnold, that's been doin' the ghost bizness!"

Bedrock started and stared at Broncho, as if he could scarcely credit the story.

"This is important!" he exclaimed. "I must call Mrs. Bedrock."

Mrs. Bedrock responded instantly to the call and listened, with a grave face, to Broncho's narration.

"There is one other p'int, an' the most important of all," he said, after repeating what he had just told Bedrock. "an' that is that I'm cert'in that the gal you've got workin' fer you, Susie Sutton, is Madge Hazelton in disguise."

Mrs. Bedrock gave an exclamatory scream and Bedrock rolled out a terrible oath.

"Oh, you must be mistaken!" Mrs. Bedrock protested.

"P'raps I am! but I don't believe it!" Broncho replied, with a shake of his head. "There's some room fer me to be mistaken, fer I never seen Madge Hazelton afore to-night."

"How, then, do you know it was Madge Hazelton?"

"An' I never seen Tobe Arnold afore to-night."

"What do you base your opinions on, then?" demanded Mrs. Bedrock, impatiently.

"I knowed it was Tobe Arnold, from what I've heard said o' the feller. He looked white an' weak-like, an' he kerried his arm in a sling; and he called the young lady Madge, while talkin' to her. He was tellin' her 'bout Dandy bein' clapped into jail. Then he said somethin' 'bout Buck Hazelton, an' I knowed who she was right at once. I couldn't jest git the drift o' all he was sayin', fer he talked kinder low, as ef he was worried."

Mrs. Bedrock looked fixedly at her husband.

"Do you know that I believe Broncho is right about Miss Hazelton and Susie Sutton being one and the same? There is a familiar look about Susie's face that has puzzled me from the first, but I never could account for it before. You remember I mentioned it to you once; and, after talking it over, we concluded she must resemble some one we had met a long time ago."

"I never once thought of Madge Hazelton. You remember we never saw her but once and then she kept her veil wrapped about her face, so that we can scarcely be said to have seen her features at all."

Bedrock was staring at his wife, as if his eyes were about to leave his head.

"An' the pesky critter's been a-spyin' on us the hull time! An' we've been lettin' her have the run o' the house an' givin' her every chance she wanted."

"Ain't there a chance, though, that you and Broncho are mis'aken? This hyer Miss Hazelton's light, and had yaller hair, an' Susie's dark."

"It wouldn't be very difficult for her to disguise herself!" said Mrs. Bedrock. "There are preparations for darkening the complexion, and she could easily wear false hair. Susie's eyes are blue, notwithstanding the darkness of her complexion, and, as Miss Hazelton is light, I suppose her eyes are blue also, though I don't remember."

"Blue as indigo!" Broncho asserted. "I seen 'em through the winder. I had a good chance, fer she was lookin' to'ards me an' settin' right by the lamp. I would swear it was Susie Sutton afore any court."

"You're allus ready to swear anything!" said Bedrock, with an attempt at joviality.

Mrs. Bedrock frowned. The case was too serious to admit of joking.

"How long ago was this?" she asked, after a moment's thought.

"This evenin'!" Broncho replied. "Did I neglect to state that? I jest come from there."

"Then, if our surmises are correct," she said, rising suddenly, "Susie Sutton is absent from the house now. The little minx complained of a headache early this evening, and went to her room. She managed to slip out, I suppose, without attracting any attention."

She hurried into the hall and advanced angrily toward Susie's room. The door was unlocked. She threw it open without any ceremony and looked in. Susie was not there.

Mrs. Bedrock retraced her steps, wild with rage. "The hussy!" she exclaimed, as she stood again before her husband and Broncho. "To think that we have been nursing such a serpent! I could crush the life out of her!"

Her handsome face was distorted by the violence of her anger, and her eyes flashed wickedly.

"Of course this cattleman, Elliott, who brought her here and who has been so free with his money—he is a fraud and a spy too!"

She sunk into a chair, her venom almost choking her.

"And I treated Susie almost like a daughter. Someway I took a fancy to the girl. Of course I wanted her help and Elliott's money; I won't deny that! But I liked her anyway. She was intelligent and lively, and that resemblance to some one I fancied I had known drew me to her."

"And to think that she is the woman we have been most afraid of, and that she has been spying on every movement! I would like to choke her!"

She clutched her hands convulsively.

Bedrock was at his wits' end and terror-stricken with apprehension. It was impossible to know what Susie had discovered. The knowledge that Elliott was Dandy's ally alarmed him beyond measure. Who could he trust? He looked suspiciously at Broncho, wondering, in a dull way, if this faithful tool was not also in the pay of his enemies. The possibility filled him with an indefinable fear.

He had imagined that if he succeeded in removing Dandy from his path he would have no further trouble. Dandy was in jail; and behold dangerous and unsuspected enemies had sprung up with a suddenness that startled and alarmed him.

"This hyer Elliott is a-zoin' to be about as bad a man to handle as ever Dandy was!" he at length ventured, with a troubled look. "He's clear grit; an' if our guess is right about him, he'll be apt to make an ugly fight."

"There's only one way to safety!" Mrs. Bedrock observed. She had been doing some hard thinking in the last few minutes.

"What is that?" Bedrock asked.

"We will have to repeat the attempt in which we failed at the outset. We must get this Madge Hazelton out of the way."

"As long as she has her liberty she will be able to get men to torment and harass us. I don't believe she can prove her title or she would commence an action. She intends to drive us out. Perhaps she will attempt to show that you murdered Buck Hazelton."

Bedrock shuddered.

"I wisht you wouldn't speak about that!" he cried. "It makes me nervous."

"We must face the possibilities!" she snapped. "Perhaps my little story wasn't far from right in one respect. It may be that they are trying to work up such a feeling among Hazelton's old cowboys, that they really will make the attempt to adorn a telegraph pole with your body."

Bedrock turned livid and shrunk against the wall.

"What will it amount to, if we put Dandy and Elliott both out of the way? Madge Hazelton is a beautiful woman. Men are fools overy beauty. A look from her blue eyes and a word from her red lips would cause a dozen men to spring up to champion her claims."

"We must get her out of the way!"

"We failed when we tried the trick afore!" Bedrock reminded her.

"I know it! But that's no reason why we should fail again. Broncho can get together a dozen desperate fellows, in a little while, who will be willing to follow him anywhere and do anything, if they're well paid for it."

"You jist bet I kin!" Broncho exclaimed, proudly.

"A dozen men, by a little strategy, ought to be able to take the dug-out, without incurrin' much risk. There are only three or four sentinels, probably, and, if care is used, they can be surprised and prevented from striking a single blow."

"Carry Miss Hazelton into the wilds of the northern Panhandle. She can be kept there securely for a year, if necessary; and a regiment of men would fail in an attempt to find her."

"Why not kill her at once?" was Broncho's blood-thirsty comment.

"I don't like the idea, and I don't think it best. I don't believe in the old adage that dead men tell no tales; and Bedrock is accused of one murder now."

"I told you to let up on that," her husband growled. "I don't want to hear it."

"Keep Miss Hazelton in the Panhandle country for a year," Mrs. Bedrock continued, without noticing the interruption. "That will give us plenty of time to act. It will give us time to dispose of our interest in the Buck Hazelton ranches. The Bower is a pay-

ing institution, and we can sell it, and everything else we possess."

"Then we can leave this place, and cover up our tracks so that no one will know where to look for us. After we are safe the young lady can be released. Then, if she wants to fight the purchasers of the property, why, she can fight them, for all we will care."

"That was my idea when I suggested the arrest of Dandy. With him in prison, I thought it possible for us to do these things. I see, now, that I was mistaken. We must get the woman out of the way. Her backers will then have no ground to fight on."

She arose, as if to go.

"How long will it take you to get your men together? We must move in this matter to-night."

"I'll have a dozen at the edge of the town in less'n an hour," Broncho replied.

"Very well. Don't let the grass grow under your feet!"

She turned again toward the door, and a dark figure, that had been stooping with ear pressed to the keyhole, glided swiftly and silently away.

A bar of moonlight revealed for an instant the face of Doctor Elliott. Then the figure disappeared in the shadows at the furthest end of the long corridor.

CHAPTER XV.

THE CAPTURE OF THE DUG-OUT.

MRS. BEDROCK announced her intention of accompanying the party that was to attempt the capture of the dug-out. In vain did her husband point out the foolishness of it, and the dangers to which she would be exposed.

"You need some one along to do the planning," she answered, firmly. "See what a mess you made of it the other time. Not only let the girl slip through your fingers, but lost the friendship and services of the man to whom you intrusted the execution of the job."

"No, Bedrock! It won't do to fail this time. Another failure means ruin, and I have risked too much to make me wish to take further chances. Broncho's a good man to lead a band of fighters, but he hasn't any head for planning; and you, Bedrock, I am sorry to say, are not much better."

Long before Broncho had assembled his men on the outskirts of the town, she had disguised herself in men's apparel, mounted her pined pony, armed herself, and ridden to the appointed place, Bedrock accompanying her.

The mounted ruffians arrived in squads of two and three and keeping well within the shadows, awaited the coming of the others.

When the entire force had gathered, Broncho assumed command, and led the way toward the river. They proceeded quietly until beyond ear-shot of the town, and then broke into a brisk gallop.

Including Mrs. Bedrock, they numbered fifteen. Broncho had not revealed the secret of her sex to any of those he had employed. Bedrock was also disguised, so that his identity was not suspected.

Broncho had executed his commission with considerable cunning. All that the men knew was that they were bound on a dangerous expedition, which might occupy a day or a month. That they were to do as ordered, ask no questions, and they would be well paid for their services.

Broncho had so employed them on more than one occasion. The money had always been forthcoming, and they were content to follow him again.

Who the strangers were, riding so quietly at Broncho's side, was a matter of supreme indifference.

Once across the river, Broncho became more explicit in his instructions. He informed them of the existence and location of the dug-out, of the sentinels guarding it, and of its lady inmate, whose capture he desired.

Having elaborated and reiterated his instructions, the party again moved forward.

Finally a halt was called, the ponies were left in charge of a few men, and the party again moved forward as silent as shadows.

When within a hundred yards of the dug-out, a second halt was made. Broncho wriggled forward through the grass to make an inspection and learn the location of the sentinels.

The moon had hidden its face behind a mass of clouds, and the shadows in the hollows were so deep as to render this precaution necessary.

In a little while he wriggled back as silently as he had departed.

"The sentinel at the front 'pears to be asleep. Can't see any o' the rest. They're a-guardin' the place with the'r eyes shet, an' a-snoozin' in the bunch grass, I calc'late! I crep' around to the winder, but I couldn't see nothin' nor hear nothin'. The light's turned down, an' I think the folks inside the shanty is asleep."

This was welcome news, and they again began their forward, shadowy movement.

Pretty soon they came in sight of the sentinel, asleep on a bench by the door.

At this, Broncho advanced in a crouching posture. There was a gleam of metal, and as the heavy pistol-butt descended on the fellow's head, he sunk forward without a moan.

The others made a dash for the door, and the dug-out was in the hands of Bedrock's hired miscreants.

Tobe Arnold was awakened by the crashing in of the door. Weak and almost helpless as he was, he attempted a feeble defense. It was useless. He was hurled to the floor and quickly bound.

As he fell he gave utterance to a loud cry for help. There was a rush of feet in the hills, as the aroused sentinels came bounding forward. They were met

by a volley of pistol-shots. Seeing that the dug-out was in the possession of a superior force and knowing it would be useless to attempt to retake it, they scattered in every direction and ran like frightened deer toward the town.

"We want to rustle around lively, now!" said Broncho. "Them fellers'll give the alarm an' we'll have a hornet's nest about our ears."

"They can't get any help here for over an hour," Mrs. Bedrock replied, coolly. "Order your men out, I want to talk to this young lady."

Madge Hazelton had not yet retired, apparently. When the door flew open, she was sitting in a chair, near the window, looking dreamily out at the twinkling stars.

She had given a little cry, as she saw Tobe attacked; and, when he was borne down in the struggle, she fell back into her chair, sobbing.

A light was now procured and by its aid, Mrs. Bedrock surveyed the girl's features.

"You lying, deceitful, little minx!" she cried, stamping the earthen floor, in her rage. "To impose upon me that way."

Madge raised her blue eyes to the angry face of the disguised woman. There was a startled look in them, but no sign of recognition.

At this Mrs. Bedrock almost lost her self-control, and fairly screamed with anger.

"Don't know me, eh? I suppose you never heard of Mrs. Bedrock; nor of Susie Sutton, either? You're a shrewd one, Susie! but you can't impose on me a second time."

"Mrs. Bedrock! Mrs. Bedrock!" repeated the unhappy girl, looking straight at her accuser, yet seeming to look beyond her. "Where have I heard that name? If Mr. Keene was here perhaps he could tell me."

"Ay, that he could!" cried Mrs. Bedrock. "But he isn't here."

"No!" said Madge, repeating the words. "He isn't here. It seems to me somebody told me something horrible about him, to-night. It may have been a dream."

She looked again at Mrs. Bedrock.

"Come! come! Susie Sutton!" exclaimed Mrs. Bedrock, her anger increasing, if possible. "We've had enough of this play-acting. You know me, and I don't see what you expect to gain by pretending that you do not."

"The gal don't know what ye'r sayin' to her!" said Tobe, from his cramped position on the floor.

Broncho silenced him with a brutal kick.

"This gentleman claims that you don't know what I'm saying!" Mrs. Bedrock cried, fiercely. "I suppose you have instructed him as to the role you intended to play in case of a surprise. But it won't work, Susie! and you may as well understand it first as last. You've pulled off your dark hair and washed the stain from your face; but I know you. You can't fool me again, cunning as you think yourself."

Madge turned her back contemptuously.

"This person wearies me with such loud talk. Who can it be, I wonder?"

At this Mrs. Bedrock's anger burst all bounds. She seized the quilt which dangled at Broncho's waist, and brought it down with a vicious cut on Miss Hazelton's shoulders.

Madge uttered a terrified scream as the cruel lash descended, and fell to the floor in a senseless heap.

"Bah!" cried Mrs. Bedrock, frenzied and panting. "She hasn't fainted any more than I have. I am almost tempted to lash her until she gives me a sensible answer!"

Just then one of the cowboys hurried in with a startling report.

"The sentinel we posted down toward the river has just come in, an' says that there is a power o' fellers, with hosses an' guns, crossed the ford, an' that as they got out o' the water they headed this way. He says they'll be hyer in less'n five minutes."

Mrs. Bedrock regained her coolness and self-command instantly. She could not understand how the dispersed sentinels could have gathered a force so soon; but that was not a time for idle queries. It had been announced that rescuers were coming!

"Tie that woman and carry her out," she cried to Broncho. "Be quick about it! Let Arnold and the sentinel you knocked over go. We haven't time to fool with them. I would like to ask Arnold some questions, but it's too late for that now!"

Madge Hazelton was bound and carried from the dug out while Mrs. Bedrock was still speaking.

The warning of the sentinel had come too late, however.

A ringing cheer caused Broncho to drop the girl and start back in affright.

Then came a spiteful rattle of revolvers. The shots sped harmlessly above the heads of Bedrock's band of ruffians. No doubt they were intended to frighten rather than do execution. A moment later the advancing horsemen charged, with loud yells.

Mrs. Bedrock, in this supreme moment, showed the most undaunted courage. Noticing that the men were wavering, she placed herself at their head and fairly shamed Broncho into attempting a resistance.

The rattle of her tiny revolver, as it spurted fire into the darkness seemed to infuse new courage into the scoundrelly band, and, for a time, they fought stubbornly.

But their heroism was of rather an ephemeral character, and they were soon thrown into confusion. In vain Mrs. Bedrock urged them to stand their ground. Perhaps if they had known her sex her bravery might have been more contagious. But they did not, and when one man fell, with a bullet

In his brain, his comrades broke into a disorderly flight.

Thus deserted—her husband and Broncho alone remained at her side—Mrs. Bedrock was forced to look out for her own safety. She led the way into the hills, and when beyond danger started toward the river.

The movement was made none too soon. A minute later, and they would have been surrounded and captured.

A horseman spurred up to the door of the dug-out and leaped to the ground. He almost stumbled over the prostrate form of Madge Hazelton in his haste to enter. As his eyes fell upon the motionless figure, he gave a startled cry.

That cry revealed his identity. The horseman was Dr. Philip Elliott.

He had learned of Bedrock's contemplated raid on the dug-out quite by accident.

He had ascended from the Bower, and was about to pass through the corridor to his own room, when he heard Madge Hazelton's name pronounced in quite an audible voice.

He soon discovered, by a little careful listening, that a conference of some importance to the interests of that young lady was being held in Bedrock's room.

Removing his shoes, he crept quietly to the door, applied his ear to the keyhole, and for more than ten minutes was an interested listener.

The reader will remember how he crept away like a shadow at the close of that conference.

He at once hurried down-stairs. He was not as well acquainted with the fighting-men of the town as was Broncho, and of course could not so quickly get a force together.

He might not have succeeded at all, if he had not thought of applying to a gentleman whom he knew to be one of Dandy's special friends.

With that gentleman's aid, he soon collected twenty reliable men. He did not know what force Broncho might be able to raise, and feared to start with a less number.

Thus it happened that he was not in time to repel the assault upon the dug-out and prevent its capture; but he was in time to snatch from Bedrock the fruits of his victory.

When he discovered Madge Hazelton lying apparently lifeless upon the sand, he lifted her tenderly and carried her into the dug-out. A number of his men followed; and while he bent his efforts to restoring the young lady to her senses, these men released Tobe and the sentinel, who had also been bound.

It was not long until his efforts were rewarded with success.

As the young lady's eyes opened, showing, in their blue depths, the clear light of reason, Elliott exclaimed:

"Thank Heaven, she has recovered quickly! Now we must get back to town; for I want to puzzle that trio of schemers. With our ponies I am certain we can get ahead of them and so arrange things at the Bower that Mrs. Bedrock will have a genuine case of spasms!"

CHAPTER XVI. A STORMY SCENE.

THE members of Bedrock's force, left in charge of the horses, had retreated at the first assault, leaving those on foot to find their way back to the river as best they could.

The trio, whose fortunes we have been following, were in no very good humor on making this discovery. Their fear that the assaulting party might attempt to ambush them, led them to make a wide *détour* through the hills, and when they at last reached the river, it was only to find that Broncho's valiant fighters had hurried on to the town.

Some horses had been left hopped in the valley, however, and by means of these they managed to ford the stream.

By the time they reached the Bower it was well on toward morning.

Mrs. Bedrock was wild with rage and disappointment. She shrewdly suspected that Elliott had led the force against them. It seemed preposterous that the dug-out sentinels could have so quickly reached the town and given the alarm. How, then, had information of their movements been so rapidly spread abroad? She could not answer the query. Her head ached from the excitement she had passed through; and when she reached the Bower she felt ready to drop from exhaustion.

Believing that Elliott was still at the dug-out, her surprise was great, on entering the Bower, to see him sitting quietly at one of the gaming-tables.

A shrewd conjecture passed through her suspicious mind. Without revealing her thoughts to any one—she was still arrayed in male attire and her identity unsuspected by the habitués of the Bower—she ascended to her own room, donned feminine apparel, and proceeded at once to the apartment usually occupied by Susie Sutton.

That young lady was in bed; but she was awake, and there were traces of agitation and excitement in her manner, while tears trembled on her eyelashes.

The sudden bursting open of the door and the inward rush of Mrs. Bedrock, set her all a-tremble.

"You ungrateful girl!" Mrs. Bedrock cried impetuously. "How dare you attempt such deceptions?"

Susie recoiled, perceptibly. She seemed to realize that some great danger threatened her. Her lips blanched; and she sat up in bed and began to dress herself hastily.

"Why don't you speak, minx?" Mrs. Bedrock demanded.

"I—Oh! what will become of me?" as the en-

raged woman advanced, with hand uplifted as if to strike her.

"Get into your clothes and leave this house instantly! Go; and let me never see your face again."

Susie, scarcely yet dressed, arose, terrified beyond measure.

"Oh! what am I thinking about?" Mrs. Bedrock moaned, pressing her hands to her throbbing temples. "Stay where you are! Don't you dare to leave the room!"

She hurried into the hall, closed the door after her with a bang, and rushed to Bedrock's room.

"Here, Broncho! Quick!" she cried, hammering on the door with her clinched fists.

"What's the row?" asked Broncho, coming out, followed by Bedrock.

"Susie is in her room!" she gasped. "We can undo the results of our failure to-night. Toss a blanket over her head and carry her down the back stairway. You can be beyond pursuit by daylight. I'll see that you have men to accompany you."

"But air you cert' in she's the gal you're after?" Broncho protested. He disliked the task she proposed to lay on him.

"Of course I'm certain! Don't ask any questions. You haven't any time to lose!"

As she spoke, she strode on in advance, and threw open the door of Susie's room.

That young lady screamed as the forms of Bedrock and Broncho darkened the doorway.

"Shut up!" Broncho cried brutally, attempting to toss a blanket over her head. "Do you want to have yer purty throat cut? I'll do it, ef you git us into a corner by your yelpin'."

Regardless of this savage threat, Susie fought savagely with tooth and nail, and managed to send up another scream before she was overpowered.

Broncho was endeavoring to lift her in his arms, when the sound of rapidly-approaching footsteps arrested him.

In another instant the pseudo cattleman stood in the doorway, a cocked revolver in each hand.

Broncho dropped his burden with a smothered curse; Bedrock attempted to draw his pistol, and Mrs. Bedrock seemed transformed into stone.

"What is the meaning of all this?" Elliott demanded harshly. "What has Susie done that you should pounce on her like birds of prey?"

"Susie, indeed!" Mrs. Bedrock cried scornfully, aroused by his words.

"Yes, Susie! What has she done?"

"Haven't you carried this farce quite far enough, Mr. Elliott?" sneeringly. "It is altogether too transparent."

Susie had struggled from beneath the encircling blanket, and now crouched on the floor, a picture of abject terror.

"It is useless to pretend that you don't know what I mean!" the irate woman continued. "Susie Sutton or Madge Hazelton, whichever you prefer to call her, shall not stay under this roof another minute."

A sparkle appeared in Elliott's eyes and he was about to reply.

"You may think it the part of a gentleman to palm off this alleged heiress as your *protégée*, and secure a place for her in my house, that she may act as a spy on our movements! But you can't fool me any longer, Mr. Elliott, and out she goes!"

"Why Susie is not—" Elliott began, but he was not allowed to complete the sentence.

"It's no use to tell any more lies! Susie and Madge Hazelton are one and the same. Oh, you needn't frown! I'm not afraid of pistols, although it is probable that a man who has no more honor than you have shown yourself to possess, would not hesitate to fire on a defenseless woman!"

"Enough of this!" said Elliott, when the torrent had ceased. "You won't allow me to explain—perhaps you will kindly allow Miss Sutton to pass out of the room."

"Explain?" shrieked Mrs. Bedrock; "what is there to explain? You have imposed yourself upon us as a cattleman, when I doubt very much if you own a hoof—in Texas or anywhere else!"

She could not bear to see this last plan fall to the ground and was fighting to gain time.

At an almost imperceptible signal Broncho had edged slowly toward the door. Now he leaped full at Elliott, hoping to take him by surprise and disarm him.

But Elliott had noticed his cautious approach; and, as the scoundrel made his leap, one of the pistols, hurled with unerring aim, took him fairly between the eyes, and he tumbled to the floor like a log.

In the confusion which resulted, Susie evaded the outstretched hands of Mrs. Bedrock and ran nimbly into the hall.

With Broncho down and Susie beyond her grasp, Mrs. Bedrock knew that the game was again blocked. Her first impulse was to rush headlong upon Elliott and endeavor to wrench the remaining pistol from his hand. But her better judgment restrained her.

"Now, hear what I have to say!" Elliott exclaimed, backing from the doorway after the retreating girl. "You cry fraud so glibly that I suppose you are acquainted with every attribute of the word. Wrong-doers are very suspicious characters generally and quick to imagine evil."

"You are the ones who are engaged in fraud; and it is a fraud of such gigantic proportions that I wonder you can use the word against another. The manner in which you now hold the wealth of Buck Hazelton is one of the most infamous outrages ever perpetrated."

"I proudly confess that I am an ally of the Dandy

of Dodge. You have caused him to be thrown in jail on a false accusation. If you should kill me now, and Dandy should never be permitted to reveal what he knows, it would avail you nothing."

"There are other men in this town fully acquainted with the story, who would take the matter up where we dropped it, and see that this foul wrong is righted."

"We have accumulated a mass of evidence which would convict you in any court in Christendom, no matter how prejudiced that court might be. And when that evidence is presented, madam, as we intend it shall be soon, your husband will very shortly after have the pleasure of dancing on nothing."

"Put that in your pipes and smoke it!"

He backed to the end of the hall and hurried down the stairway, while Bedrock turned deathly pale and sunk, in a shivering heap, upon the bed.

Susie had long since gained the street, and now stood awaiting Elliott's arrival.

"Come," he said, as he caught sight of her. "Let us get away from here as rapidly as possible. You must have some place in which to remain temporarily, and I have thought Dandy's 'den' would likely fill the bill. It is rather quiet and retired, and I have installed in it the woman who has so well acted the part of nurse at the dug-out."

"I anticipated an outbreak and brought her over a couple of nights ago. She is faithful and discreet, and just the person for the place."

When he had seen Susie safely ensconced in the "den," he hurried away to the office and residence of Mayor Cavanagh. Realizing his lack of influence with the mayor, he took with him the gentleman who had assisted him during the earlier hours of the night.

This gentleman's name was Sam Wilson, and he was an influential and wealthy cattleman of the "Nation," as the Indian Territory is generally called in the West.

"It's a little airy," observed Wilson, who, whatever his many good qualities, was not noted for his correctness of speech.

It was, in truth, early, for the dawn was just tingling the eastern skies; but Elliott felt too impatient to wait.

"We'll roust Cavanagh out and make our demand, anyway," he replied. "I shall threaten him with a suit for damages and *habeas corpus* proceedings if he acts ugly. I would have done it sooner if Dandy hadn't asked me to wait."

Cavanagh had just tumbled into bed, for he was a regular night-bird, and was disposed to be angry at being thus aroused.

He had just come from the Bower, and had learned from Bedrock something of the threats that Elliott had made against the latter. This fact strengthened rather than weakened Elliott's chances of success.

Cavanagh knew as well as any man which side his bread was buttered on. He had feared for some time that Bedrock might suddenly tumble from his pedestal, for he had a shrewd idea of the slender tenure by which that individual held the wealth of Buck Hazelton, and he was prepared to get from under whenever that tumble should come. His conversation with Bedrock that morning, after Elliott's departure from the Bower, had convinced him that the inevitable fall could not long be delayed.

"What can I do for you?" he asked, apologetically, when he saw Wilson before him.

"Wal, we come ter ask to be 'lowed to go bail for this yer' Dandy o' Dodge, what you've got cooped up in yer beastly jail, which ain't fit to hold a cow!"

Wilson was angered by the way Cavanagh had roared at him on being aroused.

"Should greatly like to oblige you, Mr. Wilson," said the mayor, sweetly, not liking to give in too readily and yet anxious to serve this wealthy cattleman. "The charges against the gentleman are rather serious."

"Blast the charges! He ain't committed murder, I reckon; though I'd hate to say as much for the feller that put him thar! You know me, an' I say I'll go bail for him."

Wilson's voice roared like the bellowing of a bull.

"An' ef ye don't, Cavanagh—ef ye don't, you'll never set in the mayor's cheer ag'in! You hear me! an' Sam Wilson allus takes keer to make his words good."

This threat had the desired effect. Cavanagh became ludicrously polite, and hastened with trembling fingers to make out the necessary papers.

A half-hour later Dandy stood in the street, a free man.

CHAPTER XVII.

LEATHERLUNGS'S REVELATIONS.

"My name it is Joe Bowers;
I have a brother Ike!"

The words, in the heavy but musical voice of Leatherlungs, drifted down the streets of the lively little city of Dodge. Darkness had fallen and lights were beginning to gleam in the houses. A flood of brightness streamed through the doorway of the Bower, and a restless throng surged along the pavements.

Two men detached themselves from this throng, when the words reached their ears, and advanced toward the singer. They were the Dandy of Dodge and Dr. Philip Elliott.

More than two days had passed since Dandy had been released from jail. His confinement had evidently not borne very heavily on him, or else his recuperative powers were above the average. He

was certainly looking quite well, and seemed in the best of spirits.

"Leatherlungs has some important communication!" he said, as they moved forward. "Wonder what it can be?"

"Hello! Hello!" exclaimed the man from Missouri, catching sight of them and elbowing his way through the crowd. "Ef 'tain't the cattleman an' the game-cock, I'm a nigger! Wonder what they're perambulating 'round in front o' that den f'r?"

Dandy lifted a finger as a token that the Missourian had been seen by them, and Leatherlungs edged his way out of the crowd, the pair following as rapidly as possible.

When safe from observation Leatherlungs stopped and awaited them.

"Well, old man, what's broke loose now?" Dandy asked, cheerfully. "Thought you were taking primary lessons in the cattle business!"

"An' I thought you war in jail!" Leatherlungs retorted. "But, come on; we ain't got no time fer jokin'. Thar's p'izen meanness-a-goin' on—hull gobs of it! Got any place round hyer whar we kin talk kind o' private like? Couldn't find you at ther dug-out, as I come on to town. 'Lowed that a verse from Joe Bowers 'ud fetch you, ef you war about the place!"

Dandy led the way to his "den," and, when they were safely installed therein, Leatherlungs discarded the mask he had been wearing, and assumed the air and bearing of an educated man. His eyes lost their look of wonder and the appearance of semi-stupidity vanished from his face.

"I have reported progress from time to time," he said, settling himself into a comfortable position. "Matters have been quiet for several days, but an attempt is now being made to run the Pawnee herds into the Neutral Strip."

"Before I tell about that, however, perhaps I had better finish my account of the trouble I had with Broncho. You know I told you that when I went out to the Phi ranch, in the guise of a tenderfoot who was crazy to become a cowboy, I felt sure my true character had not been suspected. Thanks to the training I received as a youth, in the sawdust arena of a circus, I was able to perform some feats at the bull-fight that considerably astonished Bedrock's cowboys and won for me a reasonable degree of respect and esteem."

"This rendered them easy to approach and I had not been at the ranch an hour before I began to apply my inquisitorial pump with very satisfactory results."

"But, during the afternoon of the next day, this ruffian and bum, known as Broncho Ben, arrived, with orders from Bedrock for my peremptory discharge."

"Mrs. Bedrock had suspected me. Ah, gentlemen, there is a remarkable woman! She has the instincts of the born detective."

"I was called into the house and confronted by Broncho and the foreman, and charged with being a spy. Some hot words followed and when they attempted to draw on me, they found themselves unexpectedly looking into a pair of derringers."

"They wilted at that, and when I told Broncho who I really was, you might have knocked the scoundrel down with a feather."

"He knew me, for I had been instrumental in sending him to the penitentiary at Jefferson City for robbing a bank. He served his time, but there are other things against him which would send him back there if I choose to press them."

"The foreman, I saw at once, was a man that would fight on the side that put up the most money."

"I gave him five hundred dollars for his silence, and also brought Broncho around by threats and bribery."

"Were you not afraid he would reveal your secret to Bedrock?" Dandy asked.

"Not at all. He knew that if he did I would certainly learn of it, and would send him back to Jefferson City if it took me twenty years to accomplish the task."

"After buying up the foreman I gradually worked my way into his confidence. From him I learned that Bedrock had murdered Buck Hazelton, as I informed you some time ago."

"The murder and the seizure of the property was a premeditated affair. Bedrock believed that Hazelton had no heirs, and this belief gave rise to the fiendish plot he finally attempted to carry out."

"The woman who is now Mrs. Bedrock was a resident of New Mexico. Her father was an American, and her mother a Spaniard. Bedrock became acquainted with her while on a business trip to that section, and a questionable acquaintance was formed."

"He saw that she was the very woman to assist him in carrying out his scheme, and so married her there, that there might be no question as to his own rights in the matter. He intended to establish her claim as Buck Hazelton's daughter by a resort to perjury, if such a course should be rendered necessary."

"On his return he induced Hazelton to accompany him on an antelope hunt. In this hunt Hazelton was killed, by accident, as Bedrock maintains. With the assistance of the foreman I opened the grave and examined the body. Hazelton was shot in the back."

"No question being raised as to the right of Mrs. Bedrock to enter into possession of the property, Bedrock seized upon the Buck Hazelton ranches. You are familiar with the history of the case since. Here is a list of the ranches, with names, locations, and full particulars, also a schedule of all other property owned by Buck Hazelton at the time of his death. A fair estimate places their value at upward of one million dollars."

He handed the paper to Dandy.

"And now I come to the point that brought me to town to-night. Bedrock has become alarmed, and has ordered the herds of the Pawnee to be driven into the Neutral Strip. Doubtless he intends to drive them into Mexico and then dispose of them. Or he may contemplate cutting the herds up into small bunches and selling them at remote points in the adjoining States."

"Where are these herds now?" asked Dandy. "They must have crossed the Arkansas this evening."

Dandy leaped excitedly to his feet. "We have no time to lose then!" he exclaimed.

"I haven't finished!" said Leatherlungs, smiling at Dandy's impetuous haste.

"Telegrams were sent this evening by Bedrock to his agents and foremen at the points mentioned on that slip of paper, instructing them to dispose of the ranches, ranges, water-rights and herds under their control. The orders were imperative that the sales should be made without delay, no matter what the sacrifice."

Dandy stared at the speaker in amazement.

"You wonder how I learned that, when I am just in off the range? Well, I suspected something of the kind would be done. I have been in town all the afternoon. I couldn't find you, as I said, and feared to hunt you up. The time I would have consumed in doing so I knew could be put to better use; and those telegrams might go flying over the wires at any moment."

"I disguised myself as a tramp and curled up on a bale of goods under the window of the telegraph office. I can read the Morse alphabet quite readily by sound. When Bedrock came in to send his instructions I jotted down in my note-book each telegram as it was sent. That is where I obtained that list of names and addresses. The valuations I obtained elsewhere."

"My advice now is, that you telegraph at once to attorneys in those places, instructing them to stop the contemplated sales by bringing injunction suits. I have written out a form which will serve for each case."

"When you have done that, you can gather a force of men, and we will follow the herds that are now being driven southward."

Dandy was in a fever of impatience, and the trio at once left the house and proceeded toward the telegraph office, keeping well in the shadows to conceal their identity.

While Dandy went in to send the messages, Leatherlungs remained outside and engaged in conversation with Dr. Elliott.

"Bedrock sees that the game is up," said the detective, "and intends to save as much from the wreck as possible. I wouldn't be surprised if the Bower changes ownership to-night."

"Nor I, either!" Elliott assented. "By the way what has become of this foreman whom you mentioned as aiding you?"

"He is with the herds!"

"Turned traitor again, eh?"

"No; he it was who informed me of the contemplated movement. You see he can afford to be true to me. The rascal has no conscience and will work for whoever pays him best. Bedrock gives him fifty dollars a month, and I have been paying him about five hundred."

"Rather expensive you think? Well, so it is! But in a matter of this kind one cannot afford to count the cost. We are playing for big stakes and it won't do to be picayunish. If I only raised Bedrock's price a few dollars, the rascal might expose me, in hopes of getting a better thing from Bedrock."

"He knows that Bedrock would never give him five hundred dollars a month, so he pockets my money and keeps his mouth shut."

"How does it happen then, that he is with the herds?" Elliott asked.

"He is there by my instructions. I told him that a pursuit would be commenced at once, and that he must do all he could to delay the movements of the cattle."

Dandy came out of the telegraph office at that moment. The messages had been sent.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A RUNNING FIGHT.

AFTER leaving the vicinity of the telegraph office the three went in search of Cavanagh, who, as mayor, performed the functions of a justice of the peace. On their way they picked up the cattleman, Sam Wilson, who had so terrorized the mayor on a previous occasion.

Cavanagh was just starting to the Bower when they reached his office and residence. A shade of annoyance came over his face. Dandy had come before him for examination that afternoon, but had secured a continuance of the case; and the mayor thought it likely that he was to be again bothered about the matter.

Dandy introduced Leatherlungs. "We have come, Mr. Cavanagh," said the latter, bowing gravely, "to secure the arrest of Mr. and Mrs. Bedrock."

"What's the charges?" asked the mayor.

"A number of things!" Leatherlungs replied, "but for the present we ask that they be held for the murder of Buck Hazelton."

As he said this, he displayed the badge of a public officer, and Cavanagh's hesitation vanished as if by magic.

"I could have taken them into custody, but I prefer to have warrants. I will swear to the necessary affidavits, if you will kindly make them out; and then you can direct the warrants to me."

The mayor hastened to comply; and when the

papers were ready Leatherlungs and his companions proceeded to the Bower.

"Why not arrest Broncho, also?" Dandy asked as they turned away from Cavanagh's office.

"Perhaps I ought to!" Leatherlungs confessed. "But the rascal has kept my secret well, and I promised to protect him if he would do so. We must keep faith, even with scoundrels, or we cannot hope to exercise any influence over them."

"I believe I would arrest him just the same!" Dandy asserted, gravely. "I am afraid he may give us trouble otherwise."

Leatherlungs refused; and the result showed that Dandy was correct.

The Bower wore its old air of squalor, gayety and excitement. No one would have suspected that its proprietor, Jason Bedrock, was so near his downfall, or that he was at all troubled with fears of the future.

Bedrock was not in the Bower, and they proceeded at once to his room on the second floor.

A sound of voices came from the room. Leatherlungs coolly turned the latch and walked in, followed by Elliott and Dandy. The Bedrocks and Broncho were the only occupants.

Bedrock started to his feet with a cry, as the door flew open; while Mrs. Bedrock's face took on a sickly hue.

"What is the meaning of this intrusion?" she demanded.

"Might's well take it easy!" Leatherlungs drawled, with his old assumption of veridancy.

"Broncho, put that man out! I felt that he would prove untrue to us, from the first."

The frightened look that had come over Broncho's battered face deepened, but he never moved. He was wondering if Leatherlungs meant to violate his obligation and take him into custody with the others.

"It's no use, ma'am," said Leatherlungs, coolly. "You've run to ther end o' yer picket-pin. You'll have ter go with us to ther city corral. But it will be better to come along quiet-like. Ef you don't—"

He displayed a pair of handcuffs.

Mrs. Bedrock screamed, and Bedrock sunk back into his chair with a smothered curse.

Resistance was useless, and when the detective exhibited the warrants for their arrest, they broke down and accompanied him without a word.

As soon as he saw them safe within the prison walls, Dandy began his work of collecting a force to pursue the retreating cattle.

It was a task of some magnitude, and day was almost at hand ere it was completed. But at last all things were ready, and he led his force toward the southwest.

Elliott and the detective accompanied him, thinking their services might be needed. Besides, they were too excited and anxious to content themselves in the town.

After crossing the river, the little cavalcade struck into the sand-hills, through which they were forced to toil for several miles. Once beyond these, they had beneath them the firm footing of the buffalo-grass plains, and swept forward at a rapid rate.

Before noon they came upon evidences showing that they were swiftly overhauling the fleeing herds. The cowboys had evidently been crowding the cattle forward at a lively pace, notwithstanding the foreman's efforts at delay.

Here and there they came upon a steer that was broken down and could go no further, and once they came upon a pack of coyotes that had attacked an exhausted calf.

Late in the afternoon they sighted the weary herds near the breaks of the Cimarron. At almost the same instant the cowboys discovered that they were being pursued.

It was useless to hope that they could urge on the herds with sufficient speed to enable them to keep in advance of their light-riding pursuers.

Several cowboys were detailed to follow the cattle and keep them moving, and others prepared to fight.

They fell back into the edge of the river breaks, and sheltering themselves among the hills and gullies, opened fire on Dandy's forces, at long range.

They were armed with heavy Winchesters and a shower of balls screamed and whistled above the heads of the pursuers.

"As long as they shoot that high, we're safe!" Elliott remarked complacently.

"Yes; but that will not be long!" Dandy replied. "They'll get the distance in another round or two, and then somebody will be likely to get hurt."

He had scarcely finished speaking when another volley tore up the grass at the feet of their horses and ricocheted with demoniacal wails.

Dandy promptly divided his forces, sending one body to the right and the other to the left, thus enabling him to move away from the dangerous vicinity and at the same time execute a maneuver that would rout the ruffians from their hiding-places.

The cowboys had got their range, however, and the next volley emptied a saddle and tumbled over two ponies.

"Charge them!" Dandy exclaimed, enraged at the result; and the separated force swept forward in two huge semicircles.

"Pop, pop, pop!" came the reports of the Winchesters, from the edge of the breaks. But the rapidity of motion now attained by the charging columns, prevented accuracy of aim and the balls flew wide of their intended targets.

A tremendous cheer arose as Dandy's men drew near the gullies that had so well protected the marksmen. Seeing they could not hold the advancing party in check, the cowboys leaped upon

their ponies, and fell back on the heels of the retreating herd.

Here they made another stand, and Dandy was again forced to go through the same tactics to rout them.

"They're fighting for time," Leatherlungs observed, glancing at the rapidly descending sun. "If they can beat us off for another hour, they think they can get the cattle away in the darkness."

The detective had displayed a courage that amounted almost to recklessness. His miserable hat had been carried away by the wind at the beginning of the fight, but he had bound a handkerchief about his head and placed himself at the head of one of the attacking parties.

The roughness of the country gave the retreating cowboys an immense advantage, of which they were not slow to avail themselves. They had lost one pony, but had so far sheltered themselves so well that none of them were injured.

"We'll have to charge straight upon them," Dandy observed. "If it wasn't for the hills we might surround and cut them off. As it is, that is impossible. If we content ourselves by simply routing them out of their holes, as we have been doing, they will succeed in beating us off until after dark."

"Allow me to make a suggestion," said Leatherlungs. "The river is near at hand. I suppose it is dry, with the exception of some water-holes. From the bellowing that is now going on among the cattle it is evident that they have reached one of those holes."

"If we charge directly upon those Winchester we are bound to lose a goodly number of men, for the rascals know how to use their weapons. Those cattle are crazed from thirst, and cannot be driven from the water-holes for at least an hour. If we separate and dash upon the cowboys again from opposite directions, they will be compelled to fall back as they have done before. When they reach the herds, which are now stationary, they can go no further. The thirst-maddened animals will throw themselves into confusion, and a charge will, I believe, effectually scatter them."

"That is my suggestion; but if the order is to charge now, I will obey it as willingly as any one."

Dandy saw the wisdom of the advice and proceeded to carry it out. The forces were again divided, Dandy leading one wing and the detective the other. Several good men were left in front to keep the cowboys fully employed in that direction.

Taking advantage of the shelter afforded by the hills they were enabled to approach quite near the concealed cowboys before being discovered.

The shout that arose from Leatherlungs as he led this charge seemed to fairly shake the hills. Dandy's force advanced at almost the same moment and those left in front also hurried to the assault.

It was the most decisive blow yet given and accomplished even more than the detective had expected.

Three of the cowboys were slain and the others, after falling back upon the herds, scattered in every direction. The foreman who had remained with the cattle, aided in producing this precipitate flight. As the cowboys recoiled from the terrific charge they had last received, he urged them to abandon the fight, stating that the cattle could not be driven from the water and further efforts at defending them were useless.

Dandy's force remained in the breaks of the Cimarron throughout the night. In the morning Dandy, with the detective and Elliott, began the return journey to Dodge. They were accompanied by a few who felt that they could not remain longer away.

The others, about twenty in number, remained to protect the herds; and, when the weary cattle were sufficiently recuperated they were driven back to their old range on the Pawnee.

The recreant and treacherous foreman was suspected by his followers, of the double part he had played; and, on rejoining the stampeded and retreating party, was ruthlessly shot down.

When Dandy and his friends reached Dodge they were greeted by startling information.

Broncho's loyalty to Bedrock had overcome his fear of Leatherlungs. Taking advantage of the latter's absence he had raised a force sufficient to storm the jail and effect their release.

Mr. and Mrs. Bedrock were gone; and Broncho had vanished with them.

Dandy's rage was intense.

"I was afraid we were unwise in trusting the fellow!" he exclaimed. "It's no use trying to treat a scoundrel in an honorable manner. He is a scoundrel and will be a scoundrel under all circumstances. If we had placed Broncho in jail, Bedrock would have been in there, now."

"Yes; and if you or I or Elliott had remained here, it probably would not have occurred!" said the detective.

His tones were a little sharp, for Dandy's manner nettled him.

"Come!" he continued, the old smile coming back to his face. "We have all acted up to our best light, and let us not quarrel now over the results. There are always plenty of 'ifs' in any undertaking."

"They are gone. Perhaps we can bring them back, if we make the proper effort. But is it really worth a very great effort?"

"They have abandoned the Buck Hazelton ranches and you have gained that point, and it's the principal thing you have been fighting for."

"Bedrock ought to be hung for the murder of Hazelton—there is no doubt of that! We will make use of the telegraph and perhaps he can be overhauled. He can be, without doubt, if you spend money enough in the effort. There is not a spot on

the globe in which a criminal can remain hidden if proper and intelligent effort is made to drag him into the light.

"The question is, will it pay you to do that? The remorse of a guilty conscience is terrible; and sooner or later Bedrock will come to a violent end."

"I cannot agree with all of your conclusions!" Dandy said, a shadow on his handsome face. "I will take pleasure in arguing the points with you at some other time. At present my duty is plain. I will call in the aid of the telegraph."

He stepped into the little railway office and the clicking instruments soon scattered the news of the escape far and wide.

CHAPTER XIX.

"ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL."

THE rambling building known as the "den," was ablaze with lights. Strains of sweetest music floated out on the soft, summer air. Horses and equipages filled the streets. A gay concourse fluttered through the corridors and filled the rooms; while jest and laughter and song cast their sweet witchery over all.

It was a month after the events just narrated. The telegraph had brought no tidings of those who had fled from justice. Dandy had spared neither pains nor money; but without avail. They had vanished as completely as if the earth had opened its mouth to receive them.

The flight of Mr. and Mrs. Bedrock served to convince every one of their guilt; and the Hazelton heirs had met with no opposition in entering upon the possession of their own. There had been some legal formalities, but these had been easily complied with.

And now the announcement had gone forth that a double wedding was to be solemnized in the "den," the happy couples whose destinies were to be thus united for life being Clifford Keene and Madge Hazelton, and Dr. Philip Elliott and Hazel Hazelton—the latter known to the reader as Susie Sutton.

While the solemn words are being said and the congratulations offered, let us examine briefly into some of the apparent mysteries we have met in our journey through these pages.

It will be remembered that Susie Sutton was introduced to Mr. and Mrs. Bedrock at about the same time that Leatherlungs, the eccentric from Missouri, made his appearance in Dodge.

Dandy had said that steps were being taken to discover the home and history of the lovely girl whose memory had been driven from her by the cruel butt of Arnold's revolver.

The man to whom this task had been confided was Manton King, a famous St. Louis detective, whose early life had been passed as a circus rider. Dandy had engaged him when he made that hurried trip East in search of a nurse and a physician.

The first movement made by Manton King, alias George Washington Leatherlungs, was to visit a number of the principal colleges for females. After much search, he was successful in finding the one in which Madge and Hazel Hazelton had graduated.

Their address was a little Illinois town, and there he found Hazel living quietly with an aged aunt. The information given him by Hazel showed that her father, Buck Hazelton, was certainly an eccentric character. He had not visited the place in six years, but all that time had kept them abundantly supplied with money. Perhaps the death of his wife, a few years before, had unhinged his mind. She was a beautiful and lovable woman, and her husband had fairly idolized her.

Hazel was becoming alarmed at her sister's absence, and when Manton King gave his explanations of the cause, she readily agreed to accompany him to Dodge City. In fact, she was eager to do so, for was not her sister in need of a sister's care?

The idea of introducing her into the Bedrock household occurred to King after their arrival at the dug-out, which was the point first visited by them. And as Susie Sutton, the protégée of Philip Elliott, the cattle-king, she had been of signal service. Besides revealing a number of Mrs. Bedrock's plots, she it was who wrote the phosphoric letters on the wall of the Bower. They were erased by Elliott, who had, at the opportune moment, aided Dandy, in turning out the lights.

After the attack on the dug-out Madge Hazelton regained her memory as suddenly as she had lost it; and was now quite recovered from the effects of the blow.

No happier individual could be found that night than Tobe Arnold. He was still pale and weak, but was now gaining rapidly. The terrible results of the blow he had dealt while in a drunken frenzy had so weighed upon his mind that at one time Dr. Elliott feared he might die.

The knowledge that he could do a little toward repairing what seemed almost irreparable was something of a stimulant and he announced his readiness to face death, if need be, in behalf of Madge Hazelton's claim.

This was not necessary, though he cheerfully took great risks, at a time when he could scarcely walk, in carrying out Dr. Elliott's plans.

The doctor manufactured a bullet-proof breast-plate from boiler iron, overlaid it with cotton, to deaden the sound of the balls striking and lessen their concussion; and, protected by this, Tobe had boldly enacted the role of ghost.

He had to take the chances of Bedrock's firing at his head or lower extremities. Of this, however, he had not much fear, knowing that a man's first impulse is to fire at the broadest surface presented.

He had feared, however, that the villain Bedrock had hired to toss him into the river might conclude

he had returned to life and crawled away. He trusted that Bedrock would not believe them; for he knew that that arch-scoundrel was thoroughly convinced of his death. The fright Bedrock sustained at the bull-fight strengthened Arnold in this belief.

It may be asked why, after the detective had visited the home of the Hazeltons, learned the extent and valuation of the estate, and gathered proofs sufficient to establish the claims of the daughters, suit was not brought against Bedrock for possession.

When he reached Dodge City a plan of work had been outlined that promised success, notwithstanding its uniqueness. And then, there was the ever present fear of the officials, whose opinions were swayed by Bedrock's lightest wish. A long and exhausting course of litigation would have ensued; and the parties interested preferred the route that promised success in the shortest time.

When the wedding festivities were ended, Manton King departed for his St. Louis home carrying with him the best wishes of the many friends he had made during his short stay in the West. The faithful nurse, who had filled an important, if humble part, accompanied him.

After a wedding-trip to the old home in Illinois the newly-wedded couples settled upon Kansas City as their abiding-place; and there they are yet living.

Clifford Keene is widely known and respected; and in the stately, courteous gentleman of to-day, one would never recognize the man whose highest ambition, at one time, was to be The Dandy of Dodge.

Tobe Arnold was for several years the foreman of the Phi ranch. He is dead now; but his memory will ever be kept green in the hearts of his friends.

Two years after his flight Bedrock was hung by a band of New Mexican Regulators. He was charged with the robbery of a stage. Broncho lost his life over a gambling-table in Tucson. The subsequent history of Mrs. Bedrock is unknown.

THE END.

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